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THE PARABLE OF THE GREAT SUPPER.

THE PARABLE OF THE GREAT SUPPER

An Exposition

CRITICAL AND PRACTICAL

BY

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II

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P R E F A C E

EVERY utterance of Him Who is 'the Word of God' must, necessarily, contain unfathomable and inexhaustible depths of meaning. This volume, therefore, though it is entitled 'An Exposition' of our Lord's parable of the Great Supper, does not claim to do more than set forth some samples of the store of precious truths and lessons which it suggests. But as even the crumbs of the Bread of Life are precious, it is hoped that some souls, at least, may find in these pages nourishment and comfort.

The author has long felt that more attention should be paid to giving instruction as well as exhortation from the pulpit, and to substitute, in a measure, expositions of passages of Scripture for sermons from short and isolated texts. The ignorance of Holy Scripture is deplorable; and, as our Lord teaches us, is a fruitful source of the errors that abound (S. Mark xii. 24). And this ignorance is not by any means confined to the poorer and less educated classes; on the contrary, as the Bible is often the one book of the poor, it is read and studied and known far better in many a cottage than in the mansions of the rich. Among the educated classes, to

whom all kinds of literature are accessible, the Bible is too often an unknown book, and it is sometimes found (in Confirmation classes, for example) that the children of the upper classes compare unfavourably with those of the village school in their knowledge of the facts of Scripture and of the doctrines of the Church.

There is, moreover, a growing dissatisfaction on the part of many of the laity as to the sermons which they hear in church. It is not sufficiently remembered that the religious knowledge and the religious opinions of many even of the most cultured and best educated in our congregations are largely dependent on the amount and kind of instruction which they receive in church on the Sunday; it is their one opportunity in the week of hearing God's message through His own appointed ministry. And with many of the best of our laity there is an impatience, felt and expressed (and not unnaturally), if they hear from the pulpit only crudely prepared sermons, full of pointless platitudes, weak arguments, and feeble exhortations. They are ready to dispense with eloquence of diction and originality of thought, but they do expect to receive instruction; and if they feel that the subject has been carefully studied, and that its lessons are earnestly enforced, they will thankfully receive such instruction, because they will find that their minds have been enlarged and, above all, their souls fed. Bishop Lightfoot, in his Ordination addresses (pp. 76, 77) says: 'The fact is, we

want more backbone in our teaching. Instruction is craved; and instruction, as a rule, is just what our people do not get in our sermons. We want more systematic teaching on the great doctrines of the Faith; we want more continuous elucidation of particular books of Holy Scripture; we want more detailed exposition of the duties and responsibilities of Churchmen, as members of a body—of the meaning of the Church as the Spouse of Christ, of its ordinances and its seasons.'

This volume is entitled 'A Critical and Practical Exposition,' and this must be the author's apology for a more discursive style than is usual in books of this kind. The parable of which it treats is, in every word, suggestive of thoughts, many of which bear on subjects which are always interesting, and some of which are, perhaps, more suitably handled in a book than in a sermon. If this attempt at its exposition affords as much pleasure and profit to the reader as it has given to the writer, the labour of its composition will be abundantly recompensed; and it may lead some to seek in our Lord's simple and sublime statements principles to guide their opinions and actions in the ever-recurring problems of their daily life, and also to extend to other parts of Scripture a more careful and prayerful study. One of the objects which the author had in view will be answered if some of his younger brethren in the ministry are led to give expositions of Scripture in

the pulpit occasionally instead of sermons; for, as Archbishop Leighton suggested two hundred years ago, 'possibly so much the better, the longer the text be and the shorter the sermon be: for it is greatly to be suspected that our usual way, of very short texts and very long sermons, is apt to weary people more and profit them less' (*Charge to the Clergy*, vol. ii. p. 655).

SILK WILLOUGHBY RECTORY,

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INTRODUCTION

S. Luke xiv. 15, 16.

Ακούσας δέ τις τῶν συνανακειμένων ταῦτα, εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Μακάριος
ὃς φάγεται ἄρτον ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῷ.

Quidam de simul discumbentibus dixit Illi, Beatus qui manducabit panem in regno Dei. At Ipse dixit ei.

And when one of them that sat at meat with Him heard these things, he said unto Him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then (*R. V.* but) said He unto him.

THE parable of the Great Supper is partly historical, partly prophetical; but the prophecy has long since, in a great measure, become history, and the history, in its turn, has become prophecy. The Divine prophecies have frequently, perhaps generally, a succession of fulfilments, opening out at each stage fresh revelations of God's foreknowledge and purpose, and preparing for a full and final accomplishment when 'the mystery of God shall be finished' (Rev. x. 7).¹ These partial fulfilments of prophecy, while thus becoming history, still point to their future consummation, and teach us that the government of the world,

¹ 'Divine prophecies, being of the nature of their Author, with whom "a thousand years are as one day," are not punctually fulfilled at once, but have a springing and germinant accomplishment throughout many ages' (Lord Bacon, *Adv. of Learning*, ii. p. 101).

and the evolution of the varied scenes in its eventful drama, are in the hands and under the direction of Him Who 'declareth the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things which are not yet done' (Isa. xlv. 10), 'Who was, and is, and is to come' (Rev. i. 5), 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever' (Heb. xiii. 8).

There is observable in this parable a marvellous roundness and completeness. In the compass of a few verses we have presented to our view the gradual preparation for and development of the Gospel of our salvation; the fulness and freeness of God's grace; the harmony of the workings of that grace with the free will of man; the awful responsibilities which the possession of a separate will entails on each of us; the urgent entreaties of the Divine love and mercy; the sophistries and plausibilities with which the human heart is deceived; the employment of human ministries in the call of God; the execution of the Divine wrath and justice on those who 'neglect so great salvation' (Heb. ii. 3); the blessedness of those who receive, and the misery of those who reject the Gospel offer; and the purpose of God that that offer shall be made unto all nations, and that the 'fall' of the Jews should be 'the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles' (Rom. xi. 12).

And yet, complete as the parable is in itself, it is not to be isolated from other parts of our Lord's teaching. To understand and appreciate it aright, we must not fail to mark the close connection in which

it stands with the context, the words preceding distinctly showing the circumstances which occasioned it, and the words following explaining much which might otherwise be erroneously interpreted from it.¹ Especially, it should be studied in connection and contrast with the kindred parable of the Marriage of the King's Son, recorded by S. Matthew (xxii. 1-14), which has many features so similar to this parable, that some have concluded that they are identically the same. But the differences are so many that it is obvious that the circumstances under which the two parables were spoken, and the special lessons which each was intended to convey, varied in many important particulars. Nevertheless, when we reflect that the Divine speaker of both was not limited, as we are, by poverty of language or imagination, we instinctively feel that, where there exists so much similarity of style and structure, there must have been an intention in the mind of their Author that the two parables should be studied in connection with each other, and that their kindred points should confirm in our hearts the lessons which they mutually enforce, while their points of difference lead us to search for the fresh lights of truth which they severally display.

It is very observable how a tripartite character pervades the whole of the parable. The 'Supper' itself may be explained as referring either to the Gospel generally as now proclaimed as 'a feast of fat things' (Isa. xxv. 6); to the Blessed Sacrament, which is called

¹ Ex antecedentibus et subsequentibus colligitur verus Scripturæ sensus (S. Hier. sup. cap. xxv. Evang. Matt.).

emphatically 'the Lord's Supper' (1 Cor. xi. 20);¹ or to 'the marriage supper of the Lamb' (Rev. xix. 9) in heaven hereafter. The 'servant' is sent forth three times; the guests invited are divided into three classes—the Jewish rulers, represented by those first bidden; the publicans and sinners, represented by those in 'the streets and lanes of the' same 'city'; and lastly, the Gentile world beyond, represented by those 'in the highways and hedges,' outside in the country round, 'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise' (Eph. ii. 12). The mode of call is also threefold—the first are 'called,' the second 'brought,' the third 'compelled to come in'; and the excuses offered by the ungrateful guests are likewise three, corresponding, as some think, to the threefold allurements of the world given by S. John—'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life' (1 S. John ii. 16).²

Another point well deserving our attention is the relation which is introduced into the parable as existing between 'the master of the house' and his 'servant'; the unquestioning, unfaltering obedience of the latter towards his lord's commands, however

¹ Many, both ancient and modern writers, think that 'the Lord's Supper' here spoken of relates to the Agape rather than to the Holy Eucharist. S. Basil is the first who directly speaks of the Holy Eucharist as 'the Lord's Supper.' In our Book of Common Prayer the Office for the Holy Eucharist is entitled 'The Order of the Administration of the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion. See Waterland, iv. 476.

² Concupiscentia carnis, uxorem duxi; concupiscentia oculorum, quinque juga boum emi; ambitio sæculi, villam emi (S. Aug. *Serm.* cxii.).

peremptory or perplexing they might seem ; the account rendered by him from time to time to his lord and master of the results of his mission ; the grave issues which such intercourse between the lord and his servant had on those who had been invited, as hinted by the lord's anger against those who despised his call and the fresh orders consequently and immediately given ; and the servant's deep interest in the filling of his master's house and in the welfare of the guests.

The twenty-fourth verse, though it is by some otherwise interpreted, seems to show that the majesty of the Divine Speaker was at last unveiled before the Pharisee who had bidden Him and the guests who sat at meat with Him ; and suggests to us how great must have been their astonishment and awe when the lowly Prophet whom, perhaps, the Pharisee had thought that he had honoured by inviting Him to his table, spoke of a time when the scene and the circumstances should be so strangely reversed ; when He should be the Host at what He calls 'My Supper' ; and when it would be the greatest distinction and honour to which any could be invited to share in that banquet, and an eternal misery and forfeiture to be excluded from its blessedness.

The context throws considerable light on the object of this parable. It was the Sabbath day, and our Lord had gone into the house of one of the chief Pharisees 'to eat bread.' It was evidently a great supper;¹ and the

¹ Apud Hebræos panis appellatur *lechim* a verbo *lacham*, quod significat comedere: inde quidquid comeditur panis appellatur (Stella, *Enarr.* in cap. xiv. Evang. Luc.).

guests were of the higher orders, some of whom 'chose out the chief rooms,' or seats, vying with each other as to who should occupy the most honourable places at the feast. Probably the host was a rich man, who had 'called his friends and his brethren and rich neighbours' (verse 12), and had prepared a supper of costly viands, and spread his table with abundance of provision and ostentatious profusion. The apparent courtesy of the host's invitation of our Lord was marred by the motive from which it was given;¹ 'they watched Him,' seeking occasion against Him. A man who had the dropsy had either forced himself, or had been placed by them in Christ's presence; and though it was the Sabbath, and though He knew that they were ready to denounce any act of healing as a breach of the Sabbath, 'He took him, and healed him, and let him go,' and vindicated His act of compassion and mercy, so that 'they could not answer Him again to these things' (verses 1-6).

This was in itself a fitting prelude to the parable which He was about to speak, in which His mercy to the helpless and hopeless is so forcibly depicted. Ludolph of Saxony regards it also as an intimation indirectly addressed to those in whose presence the miracle was wrought, that our Lord was able and willing to heal the spiritual distempers of their

¹ Iste princeps Phariseorum proposito malo et malitia inveterata et recocta invitavit in Sabbato, ut sumeret occasionem accusandi, et hydropicum coram Illo posuit, ut calumniari possent (Stella, *Enarr.* in cap. xiv. *Evang. Luc.*). Invitabant Eum, non ex devotione sed malitia. Magna malitia eorum qui eum pascebant, et sibi insidias parabant: cum eo comedebant, et Ipsum mordere volebant (Ludolphus, ii. p. 725).

souls; for dropsy is a figure (1) of avarice, which, the more it has, the more it wants;¹ (2) of luxury, which is aggravated by the flux of carnal pleasures which, he says, are the 'two daughters of the horse-leech,' which ever cry, 'Give, give'; (3) of pride, which is an inflation of the soul, as dropsy is of the body. When our Lord had wrought this miraculous cure, He proceeded to rebuke the pride and self-seeking of those who chose out the chief seats, teaching that pride must have a fall, and that humility was a condition of entering into His kingdom;² here, again, preparing His hearers for the truth which He was about to teach, that the Gospel of the kingdom would be despised and rejected by those who thought themselves worthy of the highest honours, and would be offered to and accepted by the humble and meek.

He then recommended to His host 'a more excellent way' of entertaining, and bade him seek as his guests those who needed his bounty, not those who had plenty with which to recompense him: to 'call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind'—a description which would be remembered when, immediately afterwards, He taught them that such as these, the poor and despised, the miserable and helpless, were those whom He was ready to welcome to His own 'great

¹ Crescit indulgens sibi dirus hydrops (Hor. *Carm.* lib. ii. 13).

Crescit amor nummi quantum ipsa pecunia crescit (Ovid).

Crescentem sequitur cura pecuniam

Majorumque fames.

(Hor. *Carm.* lib. iii. Ode xvi. 17, 18).

² Via autem ad istas nuptias (celestes) est humilitas, quod notatur cum dicitur, vade et recumbe in novissimo loco (Ludolph. vol. ii. p. 728).

supper.¹ And He spoke of a recompense which should be given to such charitable entertainers 'at the resurrection of the just' (verses 12-14) by Him Who never fails to notice any good deed done to His suffering poor, and Who pledges Himself to give such a recompense as shall repay a hundredfold any act of self-sacrifice and compassionate kindness (S. Matt. xxv. 34-36).

And here one of those who was at the table exclaimed, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.' The remark seems to have been prompted by the opinion current among the Jews that the setting up of the kingdom of God in the earth should be inaugurated by a glorious festival, of which every Jew, by right of his descent from Abraham, should be a partaker. In a spirit, perhaps, of self-complacency, undisturbed by any doubt whether he and those present with him should be admitted to that feast, he says, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.' Our Lord answers him in this parable² (and as it was spoken to one, though heard by all, each one of us may regard it as spoken personally to himself), telling him that he should indeed be invited as a guest to that feast, but bidding him 'beware of rejecting the blessedness at the very moment that he was extolling its greatness';³ showing him that 'the kingdom of God' of which He spake was now 'at hand' (S. Mark i. 15); that the feast was already spread, and 'all things were now ready'; that he need not long for it, as if it were

¹ 'All His commands being but the transcript of His own life, and His sermons a living paraphrase on His practice' (South, *Sermons*, vol. iii. p. 52).

² ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Ἀνθρωπὸς τις, κ.τ.λ.

³ Godet.

distant in the future: for now and here in his very presence is 'the true Bread which came down from heaven' (S. John vi. 41), and in the Gospel which He preached was the True Feast which would nourish, support, and bless all who would partake of and appropriate it.¹

But there is a difference of opinion as to the spirit in which those words were spoken. Isaac Williams thinks it was 'a devout aspiration secretly kindled in this man's breast, though he knew it not, by the presence of Him Who is the Bread of Life.' Olshausen says, 'Nothing like malice, deceit, scorn, or intentional hypocrisy is to be traced in these words; and with great wisdom does our Lord, in the following parable, guide the Pharisee, who had so loudly praised the joys of the kingdom of God, from externals to that which is internal.'² Bengel and Lange take the same view; but Olshausen qualifies the above opinion by saying that the man seems to have spoken in joyful enthusiasm; that, like Balaam, he wished to 'die the death of the righteous,' and that his 'last end might be like his' (Num. xxiii. 10); but that, believing himself to be elected unto life, he was negligent about living the life of the righteous, and failed to 'keep innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right,' which can alone 'bring a man peace at the last' (Ps. xxxvii. 38). Stier

¹ Quasi in longinqua iste suspirabat, et Ipse Panis ante illum discumbebat. Quis enim est Panis regni Dei, nisi Qui dicit, Ego sum Panis vivus Qui de et cœlo descendi? Noli parare fauces, sed cor (S. Aug. *Serm.* cxii. 15).

² So Stella: Ecce in hoc convivio Phariseus hic, vel quisquis ille fuerit, animo mutato, ad superna suspirat (*Enarr.* in cap. xiv. Evang. Luc.).

considers that it was the remark of an indolent man, who wished to say something when religion was the subject; or, as insinuating that, whatever might be the recompense alluded to by our Lord, to be given at the resurrection of the just, they could not do better at present than enjoy the entertainment which their host had provided for them. Oosterzee thinks that he spake these words, wishing our Lord to change the subject, perceiving that his host felt our Lord's words to be personal and unpleasant.

How many there are whose religion is one of emotion and excitement, and who trust that, because the surface of the heart is stirred, the work of inner conversion is at once and for ever accomplished! Or who, fancying that their 'calling and election' is 'sure,' take little trouble to 'make it sure' (2 S. Pet. i. 10) by diligently cultivating sanctification and obedience, though these are the things to which they are called (1 S. Pet. i. 2); who account faith the 'one thing needful,' and care not to 'add to their faith virtue' (2 S. Pet. i. 5): or who think that a few pious ejaculations or the utterance of the shibboleths and watchwords of a party are sufficient evidence of a 'heart right with God': or who reckon it to be truer courtesy and charity to let men remain unconscious of their spiritual danger rather than drag them away from the precipice, on the brink of which they are unconsciously standing. To all such a much needed warning is given in this parable. Our Lord, Who 'knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man' (S. John ii. 24, 25), would not suffer this man to depart from His presence

unwarned. Here was an opportunity which might never be presented again, and no false shame nor mistaken courtesy shall make Him shrink from exhibiting that true charity which may save a soul from error and ruin. He will compel this man, and the host, and all the guests to see that the Gospel which He preached is the proclamation of the true 'kingdom of God'; that He is 'the Bread of Life' of which 'blessed' indeed 'is he that eateth'; that they are the bidden guests; that thoughts of worldliness must be renounced and, if necessary, relinquished, that can hinder the reception of the Gospel in their hearts; that others are ready if they refuse to come; and that persistent refusal and disobedience will result in forfeiture of and exclusion from the Heavenly Feast.

And we may not omit to notice how tenderly and considerately, as well as faithfully, our Lord deals with their souls, even in spite of their sins and shortcomings. The Pharisee, from whatever motives, had asked Him to his table; and from our Lord's own words we gather that He knew that it was a common usage among them (and one, probably, to which no exception was now made) to invite those who should bid them again, and so 'make them a recompense' (verse 12). And no one ever yet did anything for Christ but his recompense was sure. And so our Lord not only uttered at his table one of His most gracious parables, which should make the memory of that feast blessed wherever the Gospel should be preached to the end of time; but He so spake that, for the temporal things which the Pharisee had bestowed on Him, he received an abundant

recompense in spirituals,¹ and was indeed 'bidden again' by Him Whom he had bidden, even to the Feast of Gospel blessings, and to 'the marriage supper of the Lamb' in heaven.

We notice also how, according to His wont, our Lord makes use of the circumstances and scenes in which, for the time, He is placed for the groundwork and setting of the parable which He speaks. The eyes of the host and the guests, as they saw the abundance and variety of the delicacies before them, would assist their ears and their hearts to understand and receive the truths which He designed to teach them. And, moreover, He hereby gives us all a lesson to redeem our times of feasting and gladness from dissipation and frivolity by thinking ourselves and, if possible, leading others to think of something higher and nobler, and more enduring and satisfying than earthly and carnal joys;² and, while we receive with thankful hearts the bounties of God's temporal gifts, recognising Him as their Bestower, yet to lift up our hearts to Him in prayer, and beseech Him to teach us so to use as not to abuse them, to refuse to be satisfied with His gifts apart from Himself,³ and to think of and seek after spiritual and eternal blessings and the food of our souls, which is Christ Himself, even when we pray most earnestly,

¹ Semper enim Deus pro minimis operibus magna confert beneficia; et in solutione temporalis prandii cibum spirituales Pharisæo subministravit (Stella, *Enarr.* in cap. xiv. Evang. Luc.).

² Cum hanc parabolam Christus Pharisæis dixit, erat in domo Pharisæi sedens atque manducans, et pulchre de corporali cibo atque convivio ad spirituale et æternum sermonem vertit (*ibid. ubi supra*).

³ Tua me non satiant, nisi Tecum (S. Bernard, *Soliloq.*).

‘Give us this day our daily bread,’ ‘thus making the repast of the body the banquet of the soul.’¹

That portion of the context which follows the parable is also to be noted if we would gain a right understanding of its meaning: for though what immediately follows in S. Luke’s narrative occurred on a different occasion, yet the Evangelist, inspired by the Holy Spirit, has been led to insert it here, as enforcing the necessity of self-denial and renunciation of the desires of the world and of the flesh, if we would not forfeit the ‘blessedness’ of ‘eating bread in the kingdom of God.’ Our Lord’s invitation, ‘Come,’ had not been spoken in vain. We read (verse 25), ‘And there went great multitudes with Him.’ But our Lord never courted mere popularity; He knew men better than they knew themselves; so, seeing the multitudes, ‘He turned, and said unto them, If any man come to Me, and hate not’ (*i.e.* in comparison of his love for Me) his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple’ (verses 25-27). Thus He bade them ‘count the cost’ (verse 28), and warns them against making a profession which they may feel beyond their power or their will to put into practice. We cannot mistake His reference to the three objections offered by the first invited guests in the parable and their prayer to be excused, though at first they had accepted the invitation. Our Lord gives in these words a practical application of the parable before us: He tells us that,

¹ Bishop Chr. Wordsworth.

to be His disciples and really 'come' unto Him, implies self-sacrifice and self-denial; that worldly possessions and worldly business must be willingly surrendered if they clash with His service; that even the closest and tenderest ties must be snapped rather than our souls be ruined and lost; and that if we would be among the 'blessed who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God,' we must 'love not the world, neither the things that are in the world . . . For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever' (1 S. John ii. 15-17). As, therefore, 'the time is short, it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; . . . and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away' (1 Cor. vii. 29-31).

Possibly, many would withdraw from following Him when they found that the terms of His service were so distasteful and severe; but, as in this parable, on the refusal of the elders and rulers, the poor and the blind came to the feast, so we read in the next chapter (xv. 1, 2), 'Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This Man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.' Thus the two former portions of the parable are illustrated by His conduct. The calling of the Gentiles, dimly hinted at at the close of the parable, was as yet a 'mystery' (Eph. ii. 4-6), not to be revealed till later. We see, in many parts of the

Gospel history, how little ready the Jews were at present to receive a truth which was so distasteful to their national pride and prejudices. And, as our Lord graduated His teaching according to the capacities of His hearers (S. John xvi. 12), He veiled from them, for the present, the mystery which they were so little able to receive, affording light to those who had eyes to see, but wrapping up the truth in the folds of a parable, lest it should dazzle and blind those who could not bear a fuller revelation.¹

But in the parable of the Marriage of the King’s Son (S. Matt. xxii. 1-14), which was spoken at a later period of His ministry, our Lord spoke much more plainly; and the contrast between that parable and this is so striking, that it may be well to remark here on their principal points of similarity and difference.

The points of likeness are chiefly these—in both we find the same figure of a great feast, to which many are invited; in both cases, when the summons is given to the guests, and they are told that all things are ready, the invitation is ungratefully declined; in both, other guests are bidden in the room of those who have refused to come, and ‘the table is furnished with guests;’ in both parables, also, those first invited are excluded, and through their own fault forfeit the proffered happiness. But the places in which the two parables were spoken were different—the first in a

¹ Duplex apud homines repertus est atque increbuit parabolarum usus; atque, quod magis mirum est, ad contraria adhibetur. Faciunt enim ad involucrum et velum; faciunt etiam ad lumen et illustrationem (Bacon, *de Sap. vet.*).

Pharisee's house, the other in the Temple. The times also were different—the first in the earlier part of our Lord's ministry, the other only three days before He was crucified. And the tone of S. Matthew's parable is sterner and more severe than this of S. Luke. The discourtesy of the first invited guests is more marked; they do not pray to be excused, but 'make light of' the invitation, and spitefully entreat and slay the king's servant. The fact, also, that the feast in S. Matthew's Gospel is a royal 'marriage supper,' whereas that in S. Luke's is an ordinary, though sumptuous entertainment, accentuates the discourtesy shown by the guests, inasmuch as a king's invitation is a command. All this points to a far greater degree of malignity felt and manifested against our Lord by the Pharisees and rulers than they had attained to when He spake the parable before us. While He was speaking the parable of the Great Supper, He was a guest at the table of one of the chief Pharisees; when He spake that of the Marriage of the King's Son, the Pharisees were earnestly plotting to take away His life. And in accordance with this, we find in the latter parable that the description of the punishment visited on the guests who 'made light of' the invitation is more startling and terrible; the recusants are destroyed, and their city is burned up; they are not only debarred from tasting of the supper, but their life is forfeited for their ingratitude and insult.

In the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (S. Matt. xxi. 33-44) the rejection of the Jews and the admission of the Gentiles to the privileges and promises of the

Gospel is still more clearly set forth. 'I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof' (verse 43). That parable, like that of the Marriage of the King's Son, was spoken on the Tuesday of the week in which our Lord suffered, the day on which, for the last time, He taught in the Temple. The hostile feeling against Him and His doctrine had, by that time, grown and ripened apace, and the truths which it would have been inexpedient to teach earlier He must now proclaim. Thus gradually, according as His hearers were 'able to bear it,' and as necessity and opportunity arose, He imparted from the stores of His divine prescience the knowledge of the future history of His Church; thus the teaching of one parable is supplemented by that of others; and in the historic fulfilments of His predictions we learn that the 'testimony of Jesus is the spirit of' history, as it was of 'prophecy' (Rev. xix. 10).

CHAPTER I

S. Luke xiv. 16.

Ἀνθρωπὸς τις ἐποίησε δεῖπνον μέγα, καὶ ἐκάλεσε πολλούς.

Homo quidam fecit cœnam magnam, et vocavit multos.

A certain man made a great supper, and bade many.

IN a parable it is not necessary that every word should have a definite and distinctive meaning. It is assumed to be written or spoken to illustrate some special truth; and therefore the details of the picture, however graphically delineated, are subsidiary to the moral which it is designed to teach. It would be unfair, therefore, to press too closely the analogy between the illustration and the truth to be illustrated.¹ It is enough if the figure in the foreground is faithfully represented, whether or not the filling up of the picture be strictly correct. But though in all merely human parables it is impossible thus to find a meaning in all the more minute accessories of the story, we instinctively feel that it need not be so with the words of Him Who 'spake as never man spake' (S. John vii. 46).

¹ 'It is a parable; therefore not to be forced every way, nor made to warrant a conclusion which the Author never meant. This were, when it offers us its company a mile, to compel it to go with us twain' (T. Adams, *Sermons*, ii. p. 167). *Multa enim in parabolis non ad significandam, sed ad implendam narrationem adhibentur: non quasi parabolæ partes, sed quasi emblemata: non quia necessaria sunt, sed quia fieri solent* (Maldonatus).

Beneath the surface there will ever be found in His words mines of instruction which no human ingenuity or diligence can fathom,¹ and every minute detail of His teaching is as full of beauty and interest as the microscopic examination of Nature shows His works to be.² In examining this parable we shall find that every word is pregnant with significance.³

‘*A certain man made a great supper.*’—We are struck at the outset with the absence of the usual prefix—‘The kingdom of heaven is like unto’—an omission easily to be accounted for by the circumstances under and the audience to which the parable was spoken. We are told that it was addressed to him who had just said, ‘Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God’ (verse 15). But though we read, ‘Then said He unto *him*’ (αὐτῷ), we must remember that it was spoken at the table of one of the chief Pharisees,

¹ Ratio autem divina (in Scripturis) in medullâ est, non in superficie, et plerumque æmula manifestis (Tertull. *de Resurr. Carnis*).

² Ego enim (ut verum fatear) jam olim mihi persuasi, in sacri pretiosique eloquii textu nec modicam vacare particulam (S. Bernard in *Cantica*. Serm. cxxii.).

³ ‘The more carefully it (Scripture) is studied, the more clearly will it appear, “Nihil otiosum in sacra scriptura” (Orig. in *Ep. ad Rom.* c. 1), “nihil vacuum, neque sine signo, apud Deum” (Irenæus, iv. 21). Every sentence, we might almost say every phrase, is fraught with meaning. As it is in the book of nature, so it is in the page of Holy Writ. Both are from the same Hand. And if you apply to the language of Holy Scripture the same microscopic process which we use in scrutinising the beauties of the natural world, and which reveals to us exquisite colours and the most graceful texture in the petals of a flower, the fibres of a plant, the plumage of a bird, or the wings of an insect, we shall discover new sources of delight and admiration in the least portions of Holy Writ’ (Bishop Chr. Wordsworth, Preface to *Commentary on the Gospels*, xxiv.).

and in the audience of a large company which sat at meat with him; and the last verse of the parable seems to show that our Lord directed towards His host and all His fellow-guests the solemn warning with which it concludes, for the word 'you' in the expression, 'I say unto you,' is in the plural number (*ὕμῖν*). And though it is true that the hostility of the Pharisees against our Lord was not, at this stage of His ministry, as acute and bitter as it became later, yet it would hardly have been safe for Himself (for His 'hour was not yet come,' S. John vii. 6), nor edifying to His hearers, if He had distinctly taught this as a lesson of His kingdom in which they did not believe, and for which they were not prepared. Without any preface, therefore, our Lord begins His parable with the words, 'A certain man made a great supper,' taking the illustration of the truth which He seeks to convey from the scene by which at the time they were surrounded. In His later parable of the Marriage of the King's Son, he opens it with the words, '*The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son*' (S. Matt. xxii. 2).

But whom are we to understand by 'a certain man'? This question must be answered by finding out who is the 'servant'—one and the same throughout the parable—whom this 'certain man' sends forth on his errand. 'A certain man' must be identical with the servant's 'lord' and 'the master of the house' (verses 21, 23), and if the last verse is a continuation of the parable, with him who speaks of 'my supper' (verse 24). Some have thought that 'the lord' and 'master of the

house' here is God the Father,¹ and 'his servant' God the Son; and such an interpretation would be consonant with other parts of Scripture, as S. John xiv. 2, 'In *My Father's House* are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you'; and Isa. xlii. 1, 'Behold My Servant, Whom I uphold,' a prophecy which is applied by S. Matthew to our Lord (xii. 18); and such passages as S. Matt. xx. 28, 'The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister'; and S. Luke xxii. 27, 'I am among you as he that serveth'; and Phil. ii. 7, 'He made Himself of no reputation, but took on Him the form of a servant.' It is true also that God the Father is spoken of in anthropomorphic terms in many parts of Scripture;² and, inasmuch as God is said to have 'made man in His own image and after His likeness' (Gen. i. 26), and as man most asserts the nobility and dignity of his nature as originally created in proportion as he more perfectly reflects the perfections of his Creator, the expression 'a certain man,' as understood of the First Person of the Trinity, would be perfectly admissible, especially in a parable. So Oosterzee says, 'Jesus is represented in the parable not as the lord, but as the servant.'

But there seem to be many reasons why we should

¹ Ἀνθρώπων μὲν ὀνομάτων τὸν φιλόανθρωπον Πάτέρα (Theoph. *Enarr.* in *Luc.* xiv.).

² Hoc de Deo tropice, non proprie, dicitur . . . ut intelligant homines de illa ineffabili natura, non propriis sed translatis rerum vocabulis ista dici (S. Aug., *de Civ. Dei*, lib. xvii. cap. 5). 'God condescends to us, only to draw us to Himself, and clothes Himself in our likeness, only to win us to His own' (South, *Sermons*, vol. i. p. 57).

understand by this 'certain man' the Second Person of the Trinity, Who, even under the Old Testament dispensation, frequently manifested Himself to men in human form, and Who, 'in the fulness of time,' assumed our nature, and 'became partaker of flesh and blood, that He might be made like unto us in all things' (Heb. ii. 14, 17). So S. Augustine understands the expression, saying, 'Who is that man, but the Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus?'¹ Zuccolius, more fully, 'That Man is the Divine Word made Flesh, the High God made man, Who then made a great supper when He united the human nature to His Own, that being made Flesh and Man He might give Himself as Food to all.'² This interpretation seems to fit in better with the general framework and design of the parable; and if verse 24 is not a continuation of the parable, but, as many think more probable, the enforcement of its moral, then the words 'My supper' will identify the speaker with the 'certain man' who made the 'great supper.' And if this be a true interpretation (as it appears that it must be), then the rendering of Ludolph of Saxony may be accepted as correct, who says 'that "a certain man" was Christ, True Man and True God, Who is called "Man" by reason of the truth of His human nature, and "a certain man" by reason of the singularity of His Person with respect to others.'³ And this interpretation will be seen to be more probably correct when we come to consider what is meant by the 'supper' which He 'made.'

¹ *Serm.* cxii.

² *Hom. in Evang. S. Lucae.*

³ *Vita Jesu Christi*, ii. p. 734.

'*Made.*'—This word is very suggestive. It implies that the feast which is necessary to satisfy the cravings and rejoice the heart of man is not to be earned by man's diligence, or bought by man's merits. It is 'made' and provided for him, and he is bidden to accept it as a free gift and appropriate it to himself. We 'spend' too much 'money on that which is not bread, and our labour on that which satisfieth not;' whereas, by 'hearkening unto' Christ, we might 'eat that which is good, and our soul delight itself in fatness' (Isa. lv. 2). The meat for which we labour so continuously, 'rising up early, and late taking rest, and eating the bread of carefulness' (Ps. cxxvii. 2), 'perisheth'; whereas, 'that meat which endureth unto everlasting life' is *given* unto us by the Son of Man, and yet demands and deserves our most strenuous labour (S. John vi. 27); for though 'it is God that worketh in us to will and to do,' yet we must 'work out our own salvation with fear and trembling' (Phil. ii. 12, 13). But labour as we may, 'eternal life is the gift of God' (Rom. vi. 23); and if salvation be of grace, 'it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace' (xi. 6). Free and full is the Gospel invitation: 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk *without money, and without price*' (Isa. lv. 1). 'Now, if His very selling be so free, what then must be His gift?'¹

A lesson of deep significance is taught in the fact that this 'great supper' is 'made' for us. We have

¹ South, *Sermons*, iv. p. 424.

neither the materials to make it of, nor the art to make it with. We can only bring our hunger and thirst, which (thank God!) is all the qualification which He requires. 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters' (Isa. lv. 1); 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink' (S. John vii. 37); 'Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him drink of the water of life freely' (Rev. xxii. 17); 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled' (S. Matt. v. 6). Men fondly think to feed themselves and satisfy the deep longings of their soul. But though they 'lay field to field' (Isa. v. 8), they can only feast their eyes on their possessions; for 'what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?' (Eccles. v. 11): the piece of ground which they have bought, they can but 'go and see it.' Or, as they 'buy and sell and get gain' (S. James iv. 13), the famine of their souls remains unsatisfied; among the 'many things' about which they are 'careful and troubled,' the 'one thing needful' is not included (S. Luke x. 41, 42), and so their souls pine for lack of food. Or, as they multiply their lusts and pleasures, they only multiply, at the same time and in the same proportion, their cares and troubles. Their souls still assert their nobility, and refuse to be satisfied with any or everything that the world can give.¹ 'Here in the wilderness' of this world, 'whence can a man satisfy these men with bread?'

¹ 'It is the proof of the ruin of the soul, that it seeks to satisfy itself with the things of this world; it is the proof of its greatness, that all that is in the world together fails to satisfy it' (Dr. Cumming's *Great Tribulation*).

(S. Mark viii. 4). It is only God Who can give them manna to support them; only the Son of Man Who can give them 'the True Bread of which he that eateth shall never hunger, but shall live for ever' (S. John vi. 35, 51).

But again, the word 'made' implies the preparation which preceded the 'great supper.' Such a feast requires on the part of 'the master of the house' much time and thought and care. It must be worthy of himself,¹ and worthy also of his invited guests; and so, in whatever sense we interpret this 'great supper,' we find that it was long in preparation. The prophet had foretold, speaking of Gospel days, 'In this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of good things, a feast of wines on the lees; of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined' (Isa. xxv. 6); 'Wisdom hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her tables; and hath sent her messengers, saying, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine that I have mingled' (Prov. ix. 1-5). The banquet of 'God's salvation' was 'prepared before the face of all people' (S. Luke ii. 31). The Gospel was 'preached before to Abraham,' when it was said, 'In thee shall all nations of the earth be blessed' (Gal. iii. 8); it had its foreshadowings in the Law (Heb. x. 1), and type and promise and prophecy foretold, with ever-increasing minuteness and distinctness of detail (i. 1), the glory that should be revealed. The Blessed Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was

¹ King Ahasuerus' feast was rich, 'according to the state of the king' (Esther i. 7).

typified by 'the bread and wine' of Melchisedec (Gen. xiv. 18) and of Isaac (xxvii. 28), the Paschal Lamb, the Manna, the Shewbread, and countless types of the ceremonial Law; and the sacrifice of Christ was the offering of that 'Lamb' which Abraham had foreseen that 'God would provide for Himself' (xxii. 8), and which, in the mystery of God's counsels, in the mercy of His promises, and in the faith of His people was 'slain from the foundation of the world' (Rev. xiii. 8). 'The marriage supper of the Lamb' is also ready, only waiting for the completion of the number of the guests, to whom it shall be said, as they are welcomed to partake of the good things 'which God hath prepared for them that love Him' (1 Cor. ii. 9), 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (S. Matt. xxv. 34).

'*A great supper.*'—Some have laid stress on the word 'supper,' understanding thereby the evening meal, and representing the last revelation which God will make to man in this world;¹ and, as such, the word would be very significant,² inasmuch as, though the provision of Gospel blessings had been foretold in Old Testament

¹ Quæ vocatur *cœna*, eo quod est refectio ultima, quia sicut cœna paratur declinante die, postquam nulla refectio sequitur, sic vita æterna datur per diem præsentis vitæ, ubi nihil aliud expectatur (Ludolph, *Vita Jesu Christi*, ii. p. 734).

² Stella contrasts here the usages of Christ and of the world; the latter offers pleasure and feasting in the early hours of life's short day, but forsakes its votaries in old age and sickness, and makes no provision for the decline of life or for the hour of death; whereas Christ, 'having loved His own, loves them unto the end' (S. John xiii. 1), and has prepared for them 'rest from their labours' (Rev. xiv. 13), and 'keeps His best wine till then' (S. John ii. 10).

times, yet it was not till 'these last days' (Heb. i. 2), when 'the ends of the world are come' (1 Cor. x. 11), that it could be said with literal truth, 'All things are now ready' (verse 17); the Holy Eucharist also was instituted at the very close of the Levitical Dispensation; and the blessedness of Heaven is reserved till the day of earthly toil shall be over. It is true that the word *δεῖπνον*, here translated 'supper,' is, for the most part, used for the principal meal, which was taken in the evening; as Lot prepared a feast for the two angels at even (Gen. xix. 1); Boaz feasted late in the evening (Ruth iii. 7); Nabal 'held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king,' in the evening (1 Sam. xxv. 36); and the Passover was ordained to be eaten 'at even' (Exod. xii. 18); and it is not likely that the Jews would have been bidden to eat meat at an unusual hour; and Josephus tells us that it was usual to take the more prolonged and substantial meal at that time.¹ Nevertheless, we may not press the word too closely; for it is certain that the word *δεῖπνον* was used also for the morning meal. Joseph in Egypt entertained his brethren 'at noon' (Gen. xliii. 16); and in this parable it is evident that it cannot be restricted to an evening meal, for the second invitation was given when 'all things were now ready,' and yet one of the invited guests is going forth to see the field which he has bought, and another to his farm to prove his oxen.

The 'supper' which 'a certain man made' was a 'great' one—a banquet, and, therefore, not an ordinary meal; the invited guests were 'many,' and the house

¹ *Bell. Jud.* i. 17, § 2.

was to be 'filled.' Because food is the relief and satisfaction of the universally felt cravings of hunger and thirst, and its abundance and variety form so large an ingredient in the health and happiness of our natural life, God has, in condescension to our infirmities, described the rich provision of His grace, both for this world and for the next, under the figure of a 'great supper.'¹ And as this image pervades the whole parable, it will be well to consider at some length how the expression represents the blessings we inherit, whether in the preaching of the Gospel generally, or in the Sacrament of the Altar in particular,² or in the glory which is reserved for us hereafter.

1. A feast implies good feeling and friendliness between the host and his guests. In Eastern countries this feeling is so strong that 'to eat salt' with a man, or 'to eat bread' with him, is regarded as a sure token of security and safety.³ Sisera, when he fled to Jael's tent, and was refreshed by her with butter and milk, felt that he might sleep securely, without fear of treachery (Jud. iv. 19-21); and it is represented as a heinous breach of hospitality by the Psalmist that his

¹ Item dicitur cœna magna, imo sic maxima, ut ejus immensitas in cor hominis non posset ascendere (Ludolph, *ubi sup.* p. 572).

² Hoc presertim Dominus de sacro illo Pane, de sancto illo Cibo, in quo consistit illa cœna magna, vere quidem magna, in quâ Cibus est Ille Quem cœli et terra capere non possunt (Zuccolius, *Hom. in Evang. S. Lucæ*).

³ 'To eat bread and salt together is an expression for a league of mutual amity (Russell, *Aleppo*, i. 232); and, on the other hand, the Persian term for traitor is *nemekharam*, "faithless to salt" (Gesen. *Thesaur.* p. 790).'—Smith's *Dict. of the Bible*, s.v. SALT.

‘own familiar friend, which did eat of his bread, lifted up his heel against him’ (Ps. xli. 9; S. John xiii. 18-26; Obad. 7). So the Gospel is a message of peace and reconciliation, ‘a token for good’ that God is pleased to resume that intercourse and communion with us which was the chief bliss of Eden, as it shall be of heaven. And those who accept the Gospel invitation and appropriate their share in the Gospel feast, feel that the Gospel is indeed a ‘ministry of reconciliation’ (2 Cor. v. 18); that ‘the light of God’s countenance’ now shines upon them; that He holds out to them the sceptre of peace;¹ and that He is their God and they are His people (Hos. ii. 23). So in the Holy Communion we receive ‘pledges of Christ’s love,’ and are ‘assured thereby of the Father’s favour and goodness towards us.’ As the Saviour looks on the guests who gather round His Table in obedience to His call, He welcomes them with the salutation, ‘Ye are My friends’ (S. John xv. 14); and the faithful soul shares the experience of the spouse in the Song of Solomon, ‘He brought me into the banqueting house, and His banner over me was Love’ (ii. 4). And in the heavenly world, at ‘the Marriage Supper of the Lamb,’ this ‘fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ’ (1 S. John i. 3) shall be perfect and complete. There shall be no ‘sin’ to ‘separate between us and our God’ (Isa. lix. 2), or to dim the reflection of His countenance in the soul. ‘His saints shall walk with Him in white, being worthy’ (Rev. iii. 4). If the

¹ ‘We are sent for to the banquet of wine that we may tell what is our petition and what is our request’ (M. Henry).

happiness of earth is represented in the promise, 'I will be with thee' (Isa. xliii. 2), the blessedness of Paradise and Heaven is summed up in the words, 'Thou shalt be with Me' (S. Luke xxiii. 43; S. John xiv. 3).¹

2. A feast betokens goodwill and fellowship on the part of the guests, one towards another. Brawling is never so unseasonable as at a feast;² 'better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith' (Prov. xv. 17). Courtesy and civility are due, if only for the host's sake, towards those who are his friends and guests; and the greater the friendship, affection, and love among the guests, the more enjoyable is the feast, the success of which depends less on the abundance and delicacy of the provisions than on the community of feeling among those who sit down. And, as a rule, when a feast is made, care is taken that those who are invited shall be such as shall be mutually glad to meet; and though their worldly circumstances may be diverse, yet in taste and feeling they shall be one. Now the Gospel binds together in holiest love and friendship all those who sincerely partake of its blessings; 'every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him' (1 S. John v. 1). As children of the same

¹ In plenitudine gratiæ nobiscum est; in plenitudine gloriæ erimus nos cum Illo (S. Bern. in Psal. *Qui habitat*. Serm. xvii.).

² It is not the quantity of the meat, but the cheerfulness of the guests which makes the feast; it was only at the feast of Centaurs, where they ate with one hand, and had drawn swords in the other: where there is no peace, there can be no feast (Lord Clarendon, *Of Conscience*).

family we meet daily at the throne of grace, saying, 'Our Father which art in heaven,' and praying for each other, 'Give us, forgive us, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us.' This is the distinguishing mark of all true disciples of Christ, 'By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another' (S. John xiii. 35). The very first sin we read of after the Fall is the murder of Abel by his brother Cain; alienation from God was immediately followed by estrangement of man from his brother man; and this 'leaven of malice and wickedness' (1 Cor. v. 8) worked and spread till 'the whole earth was filled with violence' (Gen. vi. 11). The Gospel, restoring man's fellowship with God, restores also his fellowship with his brethren. The angels sang the glad tidings of the Saviour's birth as giving 'on earth peace' (S. Luke ii. 14). The aim, and purpose, and pursuit of the disciples of Christ is one and the same—to 'glorify their Father which is in heaven' (1 Cor. x. 31); their hope and desire is one—to be 'ever with the Lord' (1 Thess. iv. 17); their tastes and feelings are one—hating sin and loving holiness;¹ and as they hope to dwell together hereafter for ever in heaven, they in part forestall its happiness by being 'all of one heart and of one soul' (Acts iv. 32) here on earth. So the Lord's Supper is ordained to be a bond of union between Christ's people, and in the apostolic age a love-feast was held with it. At the institution of the Passover the lamb was to be 'drawn out according

¹ Nam idem velle atque idem nolle, ea demum vera amicitia est (Sallust, *Bell. Catilin.*).

to their families, a lamb for an house' (Ex. xii. 3, 21), and the feast on the sacrifice was to bring the families of Israel together unto God. So it is required of those who come to the Lord's Supper, that they 'be in charity with all men.' S. Chrysostom says on this point: 'For indeed there are many things that bind us together: one Table is set before us; one Father begat us; we are all children of the same throes; the same Drink has been given to us all, or, rather, not only the same Drink, but also to drink out of one cup. For our Father, desiring to lead us to a kindly affection, hath devised this also, that we should drink out of one cup, a thing which belongs to intense love.' And again, 'We have partaken of a spiritual Table; let us be partakers also of spiritual love. For if robbers, on partaking of salt, forget their character, what excuse shall we have who are continually partaking of the Lord's Body, and do not imitate even their gentleness?'¹ Those who come to that Table are warned, when they bring their gift to the altar, to 'be first reconciled to their brother, and then come and offer their gift' (S. Matt. v. 23, 24). If any 'be in malice or envy, they must repent them of their sins, or else come not to that Table'; they must 'amend their lives, and be in perfect charity with all men, and so shall they be meet partakers of those holy mysteries.' 'Only such as are "in love and charity with their neighbours" must venture to draw near.'² It is to be feared that

¹ On S. Matt., *Hom.* xxxii. 9.

² Exhortations in the Order of the Administration of the Lord's Supper.

we all fail much in this respect. We think it enough to bear no malice, and are content if there is no love. Members of the same congregation will kneel side by side at the same altar, and be willing to remain ignorant one of another; when they meet elsewhere, they are not on speaking terms. How different from the time when 'the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any man that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but had all things common' (Acts iv. 32); when 'they continued steadfast in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers' (ii. 42); when even their enemies were forced to exclaim, 'See how these Christians love one another!' And in heaven, surely, the 'Father's House,' where all His children shall one day meet, we cannot conceive of the intrusion of any feeling of bitterness, or any word or act of strife. Perfect love must be the very atmosphere of that home of which the most united earthly homes are but the dim reflection: for it is 'the House of God,' and 'God is Love' (1 S. John iv. 8).

3. In a feast there is abundance. The Gospel invitation runs thus, 'Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved' (Cant. v. 1). The famine-stricken soul of the prodigal who has wandered from his home cannot but remember, 'In my Father's house there is bread enough and to spare' (S. Luke xv. 17): forgiveness of sins, peace with God, communion with Him, participation of His Spirit, the means of grace and the hope of glory. 'O how plentiful is Thy goodness, which Thou

hast laid up for them that fear Thee, and which Thou hast prepared for them that put their trust in Thee, even before the sons of men' (Ps. xxxi. 19); 'They shall be satisfied with the plenteousness of Thine House, and Thou shalt give them drink of Thy pleasures as out of the river' (xxxvi. 8). As S. Cyprian says, there are no bars or bounds to the flowing forth of the Spirit and of God's heavenly grace; it flows freely and with affluent exuberance; let only our hearts thirst and open to receive God's bounty, and as much capacity of faith we bring with us, so much of grace shall we draw from the wells of salvation.¹

At the Lord's Table, too, what an abundance of blessing is provided and bestowed—the very True Bread (S. John vi. 32), the very True Vine (xv. 1); 'Wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and Bread to strengthen man's heart' (Ps. civ. 15). S. Paul prayed for his Ephesian converts that they might 'be filled with all the fulness of God' (Eph. iii. 19). If the God-Man be our Food, He must satisfy our every need; as He says, 'He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me;' 'My Flesh is meat indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed' (S. John vi. 55, 57). So we say with regard to this Feast, 'Thou hast prepared a Table before me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup runneth over' (Ps. xxiii. 5).

¹ Non enim, qui beneficiorum terrestrium mos est, in experiendo munere cœlesti mensura ulla vel modus est; profluens largiter spiritus nullis finibus premitur, nec coercentibus claustris intra certa spatia frænatur; manat jugiter, exuberat affluenter. Nostrum tantum sitiât pectus et pateat; quantum illuc fidei capacis afferimus, tantum gratiæ inundantis haurimus (*ad Donatum*).

And all this is but a foretaste of the abundance of God's House above.¹ 'In His Presence is fulness of joy, and at His right hand are pleasures for evermore' (Ps. xvi. 11). As Archbishop Leighton says, 'It is but a little that we can receive here, some drops of joy that enter into us; but there we shall "enter into joy," as vessels put into a sea of happiness.' Ahasuerus made a great 'feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him,' and 'gave them drink in vessels of gold (the vessels being diverse one from another), and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king' (Esther i. 3, 7). And the Heavenly Banquet shall be according to the state of the King of Kings. They who enter that blessed world 'shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more . . . but the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them to living fountains of waters' (Rev. vii. 16, 17). An old writer says: 'Each Person of the Trinity will grant us three gifts: the Father, the unutterable contemplation of His unveiled Presence, the entire possession of all good things, and the fulfilment of every desire; the Son, clean and renewed flesh, sinless souls radiant with beauty, and participation in the Divine Nature; the Holy Ghost, the sweetness of eternal fruition, the wine of perennial glories, and the fruits of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.'² But 'it doth not yet appear what we

¹ Ubi adipe frumenti, non cortice Sacramenti satiabit nos Deus (S. Bern. *de diversis*, Serm. xvi.).

² Meffreth.

shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is' (1 S. John iii. 2). 'The Divine goodness and mercy is a subject too large to be wielded by our short and imperfect discourses; for that which "is over all His works" may well be above all our words: and therefore we have cause to turn our descriptions of it into a petition for it, and to beseech God that we may come at length to enjoy what we are not able now to express.'¹

4. In a great feast there is also variety. The Gospel was typified by the manna in the wilderness, of which it is written in the Book of Wisdom, 'Thou feddest Thine own people with angels' food, and didst send them from heaven bread prepared without their labour, able to content every man's delight, and agreeable to every taste. For Thy sustenance declared Thy sweetness unto Thy children, and served to the appetite of the eater, tempering itself to every man's liking' (xvi. 20, 21). So the Gospel is adapted to every taste and satisfies every need. To the poor who 'hunger and thirst after righteousness' it is food which fills the soul's every capacity; to the sick and diseased with sin, it is medicine capable of 'healing all their infirmities'; to the blind, it is light, and gives also the faculty of spiritual vision; to the lame, it is strength to run in the way that leadeth to eternal life. In the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper also is the same variety corresponding to our several needs. The sorrowful may 'take that Holy Sacrament to their comfort'; the

¹ South, *Sermons*, vol. iv. p. 240.

wounded soul may there find the medicine of immortality;¹ the weary, refreshment and rest; the weak, strength; the joyful, their highest expression of praise and thanksgiving; the most perfect, their highest act of worship. In the blessedness of heaven there will also be variety. An eternal monotony would little suit our faculties here in this world; and He Who is 'preparing a place for us' in heaven (S. John xiv. 2) 'knows what is in man' (ii. 25), and we are sure, therefore, that its blessedness will be adapted to our needs. The ever-increasing knowledge of God's perfections; the tracing His Providence in the history of the past of which we now know so little, and of our own past; the visits to the uttermost portions of His universe, with faculties quickened to admire and understand the perfection of His work, while still ever 'beholding the face of our Father which is in heaven' (S. Matt. xviii. 10). These will impart a freshness and variety to our blessedness, which will make it captivating to our imagination as well as to our experience. Faith and Hope, as well as Love, are to abide for ever (1 Cor. xiii. 13). The happiness of heaven, therefore, shall be progressive; and our capacities of happiness shall be ever increasing, 'for to him that hath shall more be given' (S. Matt. xiii. 12).

5. Another element in a feast is costliness of provision; 'a great supper' cannot be given without great expense. The 'feast of good things' in the

¹ S. Ignatius (ad Ephes. cap. xx.) speaks of the Holy Eucharist as 'the medicine of immortality, as our antidote that we should not die, but live for ever in Christ Jesus.'

Gospel was prepared with infinite cost. 'We are not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious Blood of Christ' (1 S. Pet. i. 18, 19). 'With His own Blood God hath purchased His Church' (Acts xx. 28), which is the storehouse of spiritual blessings. In the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper we feed on the Body broken and the Blood poured out of Christ, the Lamb of God (1 Cor. x. 16; xi. 24, 25). In heaven itself S. John saw 'a Lamb as it had been slain' (Rev. v. 6); and on the day when the saints of God shall be admitted to 'the Marriage Supper of the Lamb,' it shall be a pierced hand that shall beckon the righteous to their blessedness, as it shall be a pierced hand that shall banish the wicked to their doom. If, then, we measure the value of things by their price, how inestimably precious must be the salvation which God hath prepared for us! The saint of God, as he surveys the glories of the heavenly world, and reflects on the cost at which they were purchased for him, will see cause to exclaim with ever-increasing thankfulness, 'Thy love to me was wonderful' (2 Sam. i. 26).

6. A feast is also an occasion of joy and gladness. Nehemiah, proclaiming a feast at the reading of the Law, commanded, 'Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and give portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto the Lord; neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength' (Neh. viii. 10). Mordecai ordained that the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month Adar should be made 'days of feasting and joy,' to commemorate the deliverance of the Jews from their

enemies (Esther ix. 22). At the feast with which the prodigal son was welcomed home, there was 'music and dancing'; and the father said, 'Let us eat, and be merry. . . . It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad' (S. Luke xv. 23, 32). Solomon says, 'A feast is made for laughter' (Eccles. x. 19); and at the appointed feasts of the Jewish Church, it was specially commanded, 'Thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God' (Deut. xvi. 11, 14). And so the Gospel is 'a joyful sound' (Ps. lxxxix. 15). No messenger was thought fit to bring news of it but an angel from heaven: 'Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy'; and 'great indeed it must needs be which an angel calls great, that scarcely would call the whole earth great.'¹ Hence the Gospel, if it warns us continually to repent, no less continually bids us rejoice. 'Rejoice evermore' (1 Thess. v. 19); 'Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice' (Phil. iv. 4). And in his obedience to both these precepts the disciple of Christ is a paradox to the world; for, his tears for his sins being spanned by the rainbow of God's promises, he is, though 'sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing' (2 Cor. vi. 10). And it is due to the Lord Whom we serve that we should let the world see by our example that religion is not the dull, gloomy service which the devil would represent it to be,² but that 'Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her

¹ Sir R. Baker's *Meditations on Psalm i.*, p. 49.

² In embracing religion 'thou dost not sacrifice Isaac, which signifies laughter (as S. Bernard has it), but a ram; not your joy, but filthy sinful delights, which end in sorrow' (Archbishop Leighton, i. p. 166).

paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her' (Prov. iii. 17, 18); that Christ's 'yoke is easy, and His burden is light' (S. Matt. xi. 30); 'His commandments not grievous' (1 S. John v. 3), and His 'service is perfect freedom.'¹ 'He that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast' (Prov. xv. 15); and who has so merry a heart as he who has 'a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men'? (Acts xxiv. 16); and who is so free from the cares and worries with which all others are oppressed as he who has learned always to 'cast all his care upon God'? (1 S. Pet. v. 7.) Be the sorrows and tribulations of life what they may, he knows and feels that he has always incomparably more cause for joy than he has for sorrow of heart; for if in the world he has tribulation, in Jesus he has peace (S. John xvi. 33); if he has sorrow in his own spirit, he has joy in the Holy Ghost; his 'light afflictions, which are but for a moment, are working for him an exceeding and eternal weight of glory' (2 Cor. iv. 17); and he 'reckons that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us' (Rom. viii. 18).² So the Lord's Supper is a feast of gladness. 'The Holy Eucharist' is one of its titles; and it is an ordinance specially enjoined by our

¹ 'This Truth of truths, which nothing can repel,
From virtue's fount the purest joys outwell.'

Thomson, *Castle of Indolence*, xxxvi.

² Cujus comparatione omnis lætitia tristitia est, omnis suavitas dolor, omnis dulcedo amaritudo, omnia quæ delectationem inferre possunt modesta sunt (Stella, *Enarr.* in cap. xxii. Evang. Lucæ).

Lord as the truest expression of our joy in Him and our heartiest thanksgivings for His love and mercy. His people 'receive that holy Sacrament to their comfort,' because 'it is so divine and comfortable a thing to those who receive it worthily,' Christ having 'instituted and ordained those holy mysteries as pledges of His love, and for the continual remembrance of His death, to our great and endless comfort.'¹ And if so blessed are they who, under the veil of sacramental mysteries, feed even here on earth on this Heavenly Food, how 'blessed' shall they be 'who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb'! (Rev. xix. 9).

'Feast after feast there comes and passes by,
Yet, passing, points to the glad Feast above,
Giving sweet foretaste of the festal joy,
The Lamb's great Bridal Feast of bliss and love.'²

What a feast of endless happiness shall be theirs to whom it shall be said, 'Well done, good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord'! (S. Matt. xxv. 21.)

7. 'A great supper' implies also a great company; but as this thought will be considered under the following words, 'and bade many,' we need not dwell on it here.

Well, then, is this called 'a great supper'; 'great,' because God is the Preparer of it, God is the Maker of it, God is the inviting Host, God is the Feast Himself;³

¹ Exhortations in the Order of the Administration of the Lord's Supper.

² H. Bonar.

³ Est cœna magna, quia Dei est: quia Deus invitat, Deus cœnam parat, Deus convivium est (Stapleton, quoted in *Denton on the Gospels*).

'great,' because it is open to all the world, Jew and Gentile; 'great,' because its cost is beyond calculation; 'great,' because it is eternal in its duration, inexhaustible in its provision, unfailing in its satisfaction. 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him; but God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit' (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10). Yet this revelation is dark to us as yet, even through excess of light. Our faculties are finite, and therefore cannot comprehend God's perfections, which are infinite. The eyes of our faith are dazzled as we gaze on the lustre of His glory.¹ As God has promised to every heir of faith, 'I am thy Portion, and thy exceeding great Reward' (Gen. xv. 1); 'The Lord is my Portion, saith my soul' (Lam. iii. 24); 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee. My flesh and my heart faileth me: but God is the Strength of my heart, and my Portion for ever' (Ps. lxxiii. 25, 26).

'*And bade many.*'—The word 'and' is not without its significance. The Divine Wisdom has a reason and end for all its works; the Divine Mercy intends that its rich provisions should be bestowed on those for whom it is prepared. No man would make 'a great supper' without an eye to guests to partake of it; and it would be a mockery of our hunger if we were told

¹ 'Eye hath not seen,' etc. The eye sees much, the ear hears more, the heart conceives most; yet all short of apprehension, much more of comprehension, of these pleasures. Therefore, 'enter into thy Master's joy,' for it is too great to enter into thee' (T. Adams, *Sermons*, vol. i. p. 224).

of this 'great supper,' unless we were designed to be among the number of the guests. It is enumerated as one of the elements in the misery of the lost hereafter, that they 'shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God,' sitting down at the Heavenly Feast, and be themselves 'thrust out' (S. Luke xiii. 28; S. Matt. viii. 11, 12). Hence our Lord adds, '*and bade many.*'

The word 'bade,' or 'called' (ἐκάλεσε), is that generally used for an invitation to a feast (S. Matt. xxii. 3; S. John ii. 2; 1 Cor. x. 27). But it has several significations, and much controversy has arisen in all ages as to what this 'call' is. The structure of this parable makes it sufficiently clear that the call is not necessarily attended by any inward impulse to obey it; that it is not irresistible, nor necessarily effectual when it is heard; it is the invitation of God addressed to the will of man, which he is at liberty to accept or to refuse. Unless God calls us, we shall never, by our own power, be either able or willing to come; but unless we have a will free either to receive or reject His offers, there could be room neither for reward nor punishment. According to 'that divine saying of S. Augustine,'¹ 'Take away the grace of God, how does He save the world? take away man's freedom of will, how does He judge the world?'² The call which is here spoken of may be heard, yet not heeded; and the conduct of those in this parable who were

¹ Heylin, *Quinq. Hist.* part i. chap. vi.

² Si non est gratia Dei, quomodo salvat mundum? si non est liberum arbitrium, quomodo judicat mundum?

first called is a true illustration of what God says in the Book of Proverbs, 'I have called, and ye refused' (i. 24). We all receive what Hooker calls¹ 'the grace of external vocation' when we hear the proclamation of the Gospel offer: it may, or may not, be accompanied by an inward effectual call.

But what is it that we are 'called' to? S. Paul says, 'He hath called us to His kingdom and glory' (1 Thess. ii. 12). This is true; but as God has called us to glory as the end, so He has called us to grace as the means.² 'The Lord will give grace and glory'—grace as the way in this world, glory as the goal in the next. And this call is one to labour and diligence, not to idle rapture or confident inactivity. Melvill says: 'You are waiting for a miracle; have you tried the means? You are trusting to a hidden purpose; have you submitted yourself to a revealed command? Sitting still is no proof of election; grappling with evil is a proof, and wrenching oneself from hurtful associations is a proof, and studying God's Word is a proof, and praying for assistance is a proof. He who resolves to do nothing until he is called, oh, the likelihood is beyond calculation that he will have no call till the sheeted dead are stirring at the trumpet call. . . . When God decrees an end He decrees also the means: if He have elected me to obtain salvation in the next world, He has elected me to the practice

¹ *Eccles. Polit.*, Book vi. Append. No. i. p. 752.

² *Æterna prædestinatio sine nobis est quantum ad principium, quia Deus sine nobis elegit nos: sed non est sine nobis quantum ad finem, quia sine nobis non glorificamur* (Stella, *Enarr.* in cap. x., *Evang. Lucæ*).

of holiness in this life. Would I ascertain my election to the blessedness of eternity? it must be by practically demonstrating my election to newness of life. It is not by the rapture of feeling, and by the luxuriance of thought, and by the warmth of those desires which descriptions of heaven stir up within me, that I can prove myself predestined to a glorious inheritance. If I would find out what is hidden, I must follow what is revealed. . . . Let him see that when Scripture represents Christians as elected, it is as elected to sanctification, as elected to obedience, and the doctrine of election will be nothing but a stimulus to effort.'

Yes, 'we are called to God's kingdom and glory,' but we are called, in the first place, to the privileges of the Church, which is His kingdom on earth: and the Church is a visible Body, into which we were admitted by the visible sacrament of baptism when we were signed *on our foreheads* with the sign of the cross in token of membership. There are some who tell us they have a call from God, and, by virtue of that call, they belong to an invisible Church which consists of the elect. But the Church is always spoken of in Scripture as the visible body of the baptized; and, as Melancthon well observes,¹ it is idle to dream of being elected or called to any but the visible Church. The mysteries

¹ Semper in conspectu sit omnibus hoc Pauli dictum, 'Quos elegit, hos vocavit'! Quotiescunque de Ecclesia cogitamus, intueamur cœtum vocatorum, qui est Ecclesia visibilis, nec alibi electos ullos esse dormiamus nisi in hoc cœtu visibili . . . nec aliam fingamus invisibilem et mutam hominum in hac vitâ tamen manentium (*Loci Communes*, vol. i. p. 283).

'The Church is always a visible society of men' (Hooker, *Eccles. Pol.* III. i. 14).

of Predestination and Election are deep beyond our powers to fathom; and, as Ridley said, 'In these matters I am so fearful, that I dare not speak further, yea, almost none otherwise, than the very text doth, as it were, lead me by the hand.'¹ The call in this parable is to a present, visible banquet; and that is all we need, for the present, consider. This call is expressed by three different terms, to which attention will be invited as we proceed—'say,' in verse 17; 'bring in,' in verse 21; 'compel them to come in,' in verse 23. It is addressed to and received by different persons in different ways; but, in every case, it is a call from sin, from worldliness, from self, to God and godliness.

The call of God! how gracious, and yet how awful! None could venture to approach the throne of glory were it not also a 'throne of grace' (Heb. iv. 16). To intrude into the presence of the King of Kings, unless He called us and held forth His golden sceptre in token that we might draw near, would be to court the destruction we deserve (Esther iv. 11). The call of God might have been one of terror, such as our first parents heard in the day of their transgression, saying to Adam, 'Where art thou?' and to Eve, 'What is this that thou hast done?' (Gen. iii. 9, 13.) But it is not here a call to judgment, but a call of invitation, love, and welcome, a call to the rich feast of Gospel blessings. When Haman was invited by Queen Esther to the royal banquet, 'then went Haman forth that

¹ Letter to Bradford, Ridley's *Remains*, Parker Society's Edition, p. 367.

day joyful and with a glad heart' (Esther v. 9), hardly able to contain himself, so great was his sense of the honour and dignity which such an invitation conferred upon him. How unspeakably greater is the honour given to us by the call to the Gospel feast! Such a call has not been given to the angels which fell from their high estate, though we were made much lower than they, and the dignity of their nature was higher than ours; yet never since the hour of their fall has the voice of Mercy said to them, 'Come,' but the voice of Judgment has ever said, 'Depart.' Such a call, also, has not been as yet given to half of the heathen world. When it was first proclaimed, it was sent only to the Jews, a people separated from the world as God's peculiar portion; later, it was extended to the Gentile world, and we have been called; and it is God's purpose that eventually it shall be proclaimed to 'all the world' and to 'every creature' (S. Mark xvi. 15); but, as yet, only a portion of the heathen darkness has been illuminated, and the greater part of the world is still unevangelised. We know not why, for so many centuries, the progress of the Gospel has been so slow, nor why God's mercy should have elected us to such privileges, while myriads of other souls are left to themselves. We only know that, as S. Augustine says, 'God's counsels may be hidden, but they cannot be unjust:'¹ 'the Judge of all the earth' must 'do right' (Gen. xviii. 25). But as that call has been given to us, and our eyes see and our ears hear those

¹ Cujus consilium occultum esse potest, iniquum non potest (*de Civ. Dei*, lib. iv. cap. 17).

things which many prophets and kings and righteous men of the older Dispensation desired to see and hear, and yet neither heard nor saw them (S. Matt. xiii. 17; S. Luke x. 23), let us show that we are not insensible to such privileges, but account ourselves 'blessed' in the possession of them. Let us 'see that we refuse not Him that speaketh' (Heb. xii. 25), nor 'receive the grace of God in vain' (2 Cor. vi. 1).

'*And bade many.*'—The Jews to whom this call was first given were not originally 'many,' but the fewest of all people' (Deut. vii. 7); yet they became, as God had promised to Abraham, 'as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea-shore innumerable' (Heb. xi. 12); so that Balaam, even in his early days, exclaimed, as he saw Israel abiding in their tents, according to their tribes, 'Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number the fourth part of Israel?' (Num. xxiii. 10.) But here the 'many' called seem to be only a small portion of these; for, as Archbishop Trench observes, 'the latter parts of the parable oblige us to understand by these bidden, not so much the entire nation as those who might be taken as the peculiar representatives of the Theocracy, the priests and the elders, the scribes and the Pharisees, in opposition to the publicans and sinners, and the more despised portion of the people: for those, as claiming to be zealous for the Law, to be following after righteousness, seemed pointed out as the first who should embrace the invitation of Christ.'

But though 'many were called, few were chosen'

(S. Matt. xxii. 14). The Jewish rulers who thus first received the Gospel offers, almost without exception refused to obey the call; and, led on by their example and counsels, the whole nation, as a nation, rejected and crucified their Messiah. Nevertheless, 'the gifts and calling of God are without repentance' (Rom. xi. 29). Still, as of old, 'to the Jew first, and' afterwards 'also to the Gentile' (ii. 10), is the rule of God's appointment. Even when the Jews had crucified their King, yet, when He rose again, and 'repentance and remission of sins were preached in His Name among all nations,' the 'beginning' was, by His command, made 'at Jerusalem' (S. Luke xxiv. 47). And wherever the Gospel was preached by the Apostles after His Ascension, this rule was faithfully and scrupulously observed; for they always went first to the synagogues in the places whither they travelled, and made the offer of salvation to the Jews before they proclaimed it to the Gentiles. It seems as if the Providence of God was teaching the English people to return to the old lines of missionary work. The progress of that work among heathen nations has hitherto been slow and difficult. At the present time Jerusalem and her people are coming prominently before the religious world, and are presenting opportunities for their evangelisation such as have been never formerly known. Comparatively little account has been made of the Jews in the past missionary work of the Church, and in some quarters it has seemed wellnigh useless to attempt their conversion, and so the zeal of missionary workers has been

directed mainly, almost exclusively, to the Gentile field. Nay, some have gone so far as to say that it is evidently the teaching of the prophetic Scriptures that the Jews are not to believe in their Messiah till the time of the end, and that it is not only lost labour, but an impious interference with God's revealed counsels, to seek, at present, to bring them to the faith of Christ. But what if these *are* the times of the end? What if 'the signs of the times' are evidently declaring that the fulness of the time of their conversion is at hand? It may be that a far richer and speedier result would be shown in the conversion of the Gentiles if in every case the Saviour's rule were followed, 'beginning at Jerusalem.' If of all sums collected for foreign missions a portion were set apart, first of all, for the Jews, the words of the Apostle might possibly be proved true in our glad experience, 'the receiving of the Jews' into the Gospel fold would be for the Gentile world 'life from the dead' (Rom. xi. 15). 'They forget a main point of the Church's glory who pray not daily for the conversion of the Jews.'¹ 'If, indeed, the universal reign of Christ cannot be introduced until the Jews are brought, like S. Paul, their great type, to preach the faith which now they despise, where can be our sincerity in putting up continually the prayer, "Thy kingdom come," if we have no longing for the home gathering of the scattered tribes, no earnestness in supplication that the veil may be taken from the heart of the Israelite?'²

¹ Archbishop Leighton's *Works*, vol. ii. p. 178.

² H. Melvill.

But, as we are taught in this parable, though the Gospel call was first to be made to the Jewish rulers, who would refuse it, and then to the Jewish people, here represented by 'the streets and lanes of the' same 'city,' who would, many of them, accept it, it is to be made also to the Gentiles; for the lord's servant is commanded, because 'yet there is room,' to 'go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that his house may be filled.' And so, in the 'many' who were to be called, our Lord's eye beheld the ingathering 'into His fold' of the Gentile world; the 'other sheep' which He calls 'His' in another parable (S. John x. 16). So our thoughts are carried on to the consummation of all things described by S. John, who tells us that 'a hundred and forty and four thousand' had been 'sealed of all the tribes of the children of Israel'; and adds, 'After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and with palms in their hands,' ascribing their 'salvation to our God Which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb' (Rev. vii. 4, 9, 10). And to this end 'the gospel of the kingdom' is to be 'preached in all the world' before the end comes (S. Matt. xxiv. 14). And if the Gospel is to be preached 'to every creature' (S. Mark vi. 15), it surely is because every creature is concerned in the overtures of salvation. Men have spoken of God's call as if it were made only to a few instead of to 'many;' whereas the word 'many' is not to be

restricted, but is to be regarded as equivalent to 'all';¹ as we learn by comparing our Lord's declaration that He 'gave His life a ransom for many' (S. Matt. xx. 28) with S. Paul's statement that 'He gave Himself a ransom for all' (1 Tim. i. 2, 6). The Saviour, in His crucifixion, showed that in 'stretching forth His hands' (Rom. x. 21) He would fain draw all men unto His bosom; for 'the cross on which He was extended points, in the length of it, to heaven and earth, reconciling them together, and, in the breadth of it, to former and following ages, as being equally salvation to both';² while the superscription over His cross, written in the three known languages of the civilised world, testified that 'all nations, peoples, and languages' were welcome to the salvation which the Crucified had purchased. So long as the Scriptures continue to teach that 'God so loved *the world*, that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life' (S. John iii. 16); that 'the Lamb of God taketh away the sin of *the world*' (i. 29); that Jesus '*died for all*' (2 Cor. v. 15), and '*tasted death for every man*' (Heb. ii. 9), so that 'as in Adam all died, even

¹ 'The word "many" must not be restrained to less than all. Daniel intends by his "many," that howsoever many they are they shall all arise (Dan. xii. 2); as S. Paul does when he says, "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners," that is, all; for "death passed over all men, for *all* have sinned" (Rom. v. 12). And Christ did but paraphrase this plan of Daniel, who says "many," when He says "all"—"all that are in the graves" (S. John v. 28).—(Donne's *Sermons*.) See S. Aug. *de Civ. Dei*, l. xx., c. xxiii.

² Archbishop Leighton's *Works*, vol. i. p. 201.

so in Christ might *all be made alive*' (1 Cor. xv. 22) —so long are we bound to sow broadcast the seed of the Divine Word, and cry, 'Ho, *every one* that thirsteth, come ye to the waters' (Isa. lv. 1); '*Whosoever* will, let him take of the water of life freely' (Rev. xxii. 17). Therefore, we may not, in a spirit of exclusiveness, restrict the merits and the efficacy of the Saviour's death, nor, consequently, the offer of the Gospel message to a few. Wide as the world is the Gospel offer, for 'God would have all men to be saved' (1 Tim. ii. 4). But while we rejoice in the universality of the Gospel call, we must remember that that call is particular as well as general, individual as well as universal. The call, 'Ho, every one,' may and must be heard by each one of us as if the voice cried, 'Ho, such an one;' as in one place S. Paul says, 'Christ hath loved us, and given Himself for us' (Eph. v. 2), but in another, 'The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me' (Gal. ii. 20). Our Lord's words '*whosoever*' includes necessarily each one of us. So true are the words of the parable, 'A certain man made a great supper, and bade many'; so personal also is their interest and application, for among the '*many called*,' we are, by His grace and mercy, included.

On the other hand, we may not forget the solemn warning, 'Many are called, but few are chosen' (S. Matt. xxii. 14). The beginning and the end of this parable must not be put asunder; the first words declaring, He '*bade many*'; the last, 'I say unto you, That none of those men that were bidden shall taste of My

Supper.' The sad expostulation of the Old Testament, 'I called, and ye refused; I stretched out Mine hand, and no man regarded' (Prov. i. 24), is repeated in the New, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!' (S. Matt. xxiii. 37.) Universal redemption is one thing, universal salvation quite another. Life and death, blessing and cursing, are set before us; it rests with each of us to choose for ourselves which we will have (Deut. xxx. 19; Eccles. xv. 14-17). God will not force His salvation on any of us, nor will Christ come where He is not welcome. The 'great supper' is made, the guests are bidden; 'all things are now ready,' and God's 'House shall be filled.' But though we are among those called to partake of its blessedness, we may, nevertheless, forfeit our share of it by our indifference and neglect.¹ Many are called to it, and many shall sit down to it; so many, that there will be room for us; so many, that there will be no lack without us. O that, hearing His voice, we might run with alacrity to obey it, saying, 'Here am I; for Thou calledst me' (1 Sam. iii. 5).

¹ The same word (*ἀμελήσαντες*) is used in S. Matt. xxii. 5 for '*they made light of it*,' as in Heb. ii. 3 for '*if we neglect so great salvation*.'

CHAPTER II

S. Luke xiv. 17.

Καὶ ἀπέστειλε τὸν δοῦλον αὐτοῦ τῇ ὥρᾳ τοῦ δείπνου, εἰπεῖν τοῖς κεκλημένοις, Ἐρχεσθε, ὅτι ἤδη ἔτοιμά ἐστι πάντα.

Et misit servum suum hora cœnæ dicere invitatis, ut venirent, quia jam parata sunt omnia.

And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come ; for all things are now ready.

‘*AND.*’ The conjunction again claims our notice.

As it is a common fault with careless readers to clip the smaller words, so that they are often inaudible to the hearers, so it frequently happens that these small words are slurred over as unimportant in our study of the Scriptures, whereas they are suggestive of much thought.¹ The ‘great supper’ had been made and the guests bidden ; but when all things were ready, a further notice is given to those who were invited. This may intimate to us the urgency with which God deals with the souls of men, leaving nothing undone on His part to secure their happiness and welfare. Some have

¹ As an illustration, let any one read Isa. v. 1-4 : ‘My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill : and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein : and he looked that it should bring forth grapes.’ Who cannot see that the repetition of the ‘and’ is emphatic and explanatory of the demand : ‘What more could I have done to my vineyard that I have not done in it?’ See also 1 Kings xviii. 38 and 2 Chron. i. 12.

thought that in these words a hint is already given of the unwillingness of the invited guests to come. But it was quite in accordance with the usual custom on such occasions in those countries to send round a servant to summon the guests when the supper was actually ready (Esther vi. 14). They had already received and accepted the invitation,¹ and the servant sent to summon them takes for granted that they will fulfil their engagement.

Something parallel to this is frequently observable in God's dealings with souls. A general call is given, which the individual soul hears, appropriates, and accepts; but after a longer or shorter interval a more particular call is sent, and that is the more critical time in that soul's history.² It is comparatively easy to give assent to the truths of the Gospel; to admire the beauty and grace of Christ's character and doctrine; to feel that it is abundantly worth while to sacrifice all to secure Him; and, in the first hours of excitement and enthusiasm, to pledge ourselves to the acceptance of His service. But our Lord often deals with us as He did with His first disciples. It would seem that He called Simon and Andrew, James and John, at first with a more general call; and that, after receiving it, they returned for a time to their wonted occupations, to carry into their daily work the impressions which that call had awakened, to ponder over His words, and to long for fuller revelations and a closer communion with Him.

¹ Compare S. Matt. xxii. 3: καὶ ἀπέστειλε τοὺς δούλους αὐτοῦ καλεῖσαι τοὺς κεκλημένους.

² See Maurice, *Prophets and Kings of the Old Testament*, pp. 230, 231.

For the present, their boats and nets must be attended to ; they can work for Him as yet nowhere so well as there. There they must carry their newly excited convictions, muse over His words, and try to practise, amidst the common employments of their ordinary life, what they have already learned of Christ. The day was to come when the voice should be heard again, calling them to higher ventures of faith, to a closer attendance on their Lord, to a nobler work in His service (S. Luke v. 10), and a larger share of His cross and of His crown. At His word, 'Follow Me,' they should then 'forsake all and follow Him' (v. 11).

So it often is now. Christ calls us so as to attract us to Himself, and then leaves us, as it were, to ponder over His words, to guard and cherish the newly implanted seed, and foster its growth in the heart and conscience ; and then He calls us again to more definite work for Him and more total surrender of ourselves to His service, accompanying His call by a greater exercise of His power (Ps. cx. 3) and a fuller manifestation of His grace and love. That is the critical time in the history of many a soul, when it has definitely to determine whether the world and sin and self shall be sacrificed to obey with a perfect self-surrender the call of Christ. It is not enough to have accepted the invitation of His grace while the terms of the invitation were only general. Now when all things are ready, and our place and our work is already assigned to and waiting for us, the question is whether we will abide by our former engagements, and come or refuse to come. Many in their Confirmation

make a solemn choice of Christ's service, and promise obedience to the commands of Him Whose Spirit they have received in the laying on of hands; but when the definite act of obedience is required to come to His Table, they, like those in the parable, 'begin to make excuse.'

There has been a considerable difference of opinion as to whom we are to understand by the 'servant' whom, throughout the parable, the lord sends to summon his guests to the feast. We have already seen that by the 'certain man' is probably meant 'the Man Christ Jesus' (1 Tim. ii. 5); and if this interpretation be correct, then by 'his servant' must be meant the standing order of the ministry which He has appointed to proclaim the tidings of His Gospel and urge men to accept it. Theophylact, indeed, explains this 'servant' whom the lord sent (*ἀπέστειλε*) to mean the great 'Apostle' (*ἀπόστολον*) and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus' (Heb. iii. 1). But there our Lord is especially contrasted, as the Son, with Moses, who was the servant (*θεράπων*); and though, as has been shown above, our Lord is often spoken of as God's 'Servant,' yet it seems incongruous with the other parts of the parable that He should be represented as such here. The 'servant' is one and the same throughout the parable; and though it is true that what is done by His ministers in His Name and by His authority is done by Christ Himself (S. Luke x. 16; S. John iv. 1, 2), yet this will hardly apply here, if the 24th verse contains, as it probably does, the moral of the parable, in which our Lord speaks of 'My supper'; in which case He must be 'the master of the house,' the giver of the

feast, and 'the lord' of the servant sent to summon the guests.

The 'servant,' then, seems to represent the authorised and duly commissioned ministers of the Gospel. In one sense, even the prophets of the Old Testament Dispensation may be included, though they could only foretell Gospel blessings as still future, and could not declare, 'All things are now ready.' For if we look to Isaiah lv. and other kindred passages, we see how the telescopic power of faith spanned the intervening centuries, and brought the actually distant into nearness and distinctiveness of vision. 'The substance of things hoped for' was thus realised and enjoyed by those in Old Testament times, whether prophets or people, who rested their faith on the promises of God. With still greater propriety may this 'servant' be understood to mean the apostles whom our Lord commissioned to call the Jews, and, after His Ascension, to extend the call to the Gentiles. But the term must not be confined to these. It will be seen that the servant, being bidden to 'go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in,' does not return to his 'lord.' His work is still going on, and will not be finished till 'the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled' (S. Luke xxi. 24). Strictly speaking, it could not be said that 'all things were now ready' till the Sacrifice on Calvary had been offered, and the Church with its ordinances and means of grace had been founded, which was not till the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given to abide with the Church for ever. It seems best, therefore, to regard

this 'servant' as representing the appointed ministry of the Christian Church from the days of the apostles to the end of the world.

If it be objected that the servant is one throughout, it may be answered that, though the messengers of God's grace were many, and delivered their message at different times, yet their testimony was one and the same, as Zacharias said, 'God spake by *the mouth* of His holy prophets' (S. Luke i. 70; Acts iii. 18); for the many prophets had but one mouth and one message, so perfect was the consent and harmony of all. Stella observes here that in Scripture a whole body of people is often spoken of as one person; as the Lord said unto Pharaoh, 'Israel is My son, even My firstborn' (Exod. iv. 22).¹ Ludolph of Saxony says, 'The servant here is the preacher of the Gospel; and though the servants are many by reason of the diversity of their persons, condition, and character, yet they ought to be one in the unity of their faith and charity.'²

'*Sent.*'—This word is important, and must not be passed over. The word used is ἀπέστειλε, from which the word 'apostle' is formed. In both Dispensations

¹ Per hunc servum cœtum prædicationum intellige. Sæpe enim in Scripturis fit sermo de totâ plebe, aut de multitudine, sub unâ personâ. Sic Dominus loquitur Pharaoni, Dixi tibi, dimitte filium meum, i.e. populum Hebræorum (*Enarr.* in cap. xiv. Luc. Evang.).

² 'Misit suum servum,' i.e. prædicatorem Evangelicum: et licet plures sint servi, personarum, statuum, et habituum diversitate, unum tamen debent esse fidei et caritatis unitate (*Vita Jesu Christi*, ii. p. 734).

Omnes ministri Evangelici sunt plures et unus; plures, quia per diversas mundi partes sunt diffusi; unus vero, quia ita doctrinâ, charitate, unionem et concordiam sunt inter se coadunati, ut non plures sed unus videantur (Sylveira, quoted by Denton).

the *mission* is made an important and indispensable feature in the authority of those who are to declare God's message; and it would obviously be an impertinence and presumption for any one, without the authority of 'the master of the house,' to invite guests to his table. It will be well, therefore, to dwell for a while on this word; the more so as, in these days, many do not scruple to take upon themselves the office of the ministry, though the apostle says, 'No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron'¹—'called,' that is, not merely by an inward vocation, about the possession of which one may often be deceived, but also solemnly set apart by the outward ministry of those whom Christ has appointed to send labourers into His vineyard, and has invested with the credentials necessary for those who, as His ambassadors, are authorised to act and speak in His Name.² If the priestly and prophetic offices under the Old Testament Dispensation were so jealously fenced and guarded

¹ 'As was Aaron'; that is to say, not called of God directly, but called, as Aaron was, by one commissioned of God to call him (H. Newland).

² 'Neither will it suffice to say they have the inward call of the Spirit; for since God hath established an order in the Church for the admitting men to this office, they that shall take it upon them without that authority resist that ordinance, and are but of the number of those "thieves and robbers," as our Lord speaks (S. John x.) "which come not in by the door." Besides, the sad experience of these times sheweth that many who pretend most to this inward call of the Spirit are called by some other spirit than that of God, the doctrines they vent being usually directly contrary to that Word of His on which all true doctrines must be founded. Such are to be looked on as those seducers, those false apostles whereof we are so often warned in the Epistles of the Apostles' (*Whole Duty of Man*, p. 172).

from alien usurpation, how much more may we expect it to be the case with the ministry of the Gospel, which is so much 'more glorious' than that of the Law! (2 Cor. iii. 9, 10.) 'Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers?' Has not God, by His own act, 'set in the Church' each of its members in his own separate and peculiar 'vocation and ministry'? (1 Cor. xii. 28, 29).

In the Old Testament it is very observable how great a stress is laid on the being 'sent' to minister in holy things, and how necessary it was to have not only a vocation, but also a mission for such an office. The awful judgments inflicted on Korah and on his company¹ for their usurpation of the priestly office and their presumption in offering incense before the Lord was not only in itself a public manifestation of the jealous care with which God hedges round the office of those whom He truly sends to minister in His Name; but, that it might ever be remembered throughout their generations, the censers with which they had offered incense were made, by His command, into broad plates for the altar, and set up in the Tabernacle, 'to be a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the sons of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the Lord; that he be not as Korah, and his company' (Num. xvi. 40). In a later reference in the same

¹ The appointment of the chapters containing this narrative for the first lessons on the first Sunday after Easter, when taken in connection with the Gospel for that day, is a significant illustration of the use which the Church would have us make of that sad story. John Wesley's application of the same subject in the same sense, in his sermon on Korah, is well known.

book to their sin and punishment, it is said, 'This is that Korah and Abiram, which were famous in the congregation, who strove against Moses and Aaron, when they strove against the Lord . . . and they became a sign' (xxvi. 9, 10); where the expression, 'This is that Korah and Abiram,' reminds us of the stigma branded on Ahaz [for his idolatry, 'This is that king Ahaz' (2 Chron. xxviii. 22). In the services of the Tabernacle and the Temple, as in all Christian sanctuaries, the punishment of their sin is ever spoken of as an illustration of God's justice and holiness (Ps. cvi. 16, 18). And in the Epistle of S. Jude, which he wrote for the special purpose of exhorting those who received it to 'contend earnestly for the Faith once for all' (ἀπαξ) 'delivered unto the saints' (verse 3), and to warn them against those who, in the last times, should 'separate themselves' from the Body of the Faithful, he makes mention of those who 'perish in the gainsaying of Core' (verse 11), showing that the same sin may be practised in Christian times, and that, though the office of the priesthood is now higher and holier, some will be found to dare to usurp its ministries.

Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, has this brand fixed on his name throughout the Scripture record, 'who sinned, and made Israel to sin,' in that he offered on the altar that he had made, and led the ten tribes away from the altar at Jerusalem, and 'made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi: whosoever would, he consecrated him' (1 Kings xiii. 33). On which South makes this incisive comment, 'Idolaters themselves are not so far gone as to venture on the

priesthood without consecration and a call.’¹ ‘And this thing became a sin to the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from the face of the earth’ (1 Kings xiii. 34).²

By the Prophet Ezekiel God speaks thus of those who presumed to speak in His Name, having received no commission from Himself, but ‘prophesied out of their own heart’ (xiii. 2), and ‘against the daughters of Israel who did the same’ (verse 17): ‘Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!’ (verse 3); ‘They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The Lord saith: and the Lord hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word’ (verse 6).³

¹ *Sermons*, vol. i. p. 72.

² ‘It is not the custom of the Bible to call people by hard names. Even in the New Testament we do not read of Judas Iscariot when he is spoken of as “that miserable wretch,” “that execrable betrayer,” and so on. But of Jeroboam we do constantly read by a hard name. To the end of the history of the kings of Israel it is, “Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin”’ (Neale’s *Sermons*).

‘All across their history, God has placed this record, “The sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin,” as though it furnished the key to all that befel them. It is a record that is repeated more than twenty times, is applied to some fifteen reigns, and ranges over 250 years’ (Garnier, *Church or Dissent*, p. 20).

³ ‘Without the due episcopal ordination, an inward call is but as the budding of a tree which lacks the requisite conditions of climate or of soil to produce its proper flower and fruit. Such calls are among the mysteries of the spiritual world; they are spiritual parallels to the vast and mysterious waste of nature. They are found in the outskirts of, or even beyond the kingdom of grace, where the full meed of rain and sunshine is wanting. We mourn as we witness the effects around us, produced by these anomalies—efforts earnest and devoted, yet, withal, spasmodic and incomplete; achieving, undoubtedly, a large measure of well-intentioned disorder, but destined surely, as the years pass on, to wither and die back into weakness and inactivity’ (Liddon, *Clerical Life and Work*, p. 212).

And it is much to be observed, by those who frequent the teaching of such, that the same punishment is threatened against ‘the prophet and him that seeketh unto him’ (Ezek. xiv. 10).¹

The true prophets of God have ever waited to be sent before they entered on their office; as Isaiah when he saw the vision of Christ in the Temple (S. John xii. 41), and heard the voice say, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ said, ‘Here am I; send me,’ but did not stir till the voice said, ‘Go’ (Isa. vi. 8, 9).

Our Lord, in His Sermon on the Mount, bids us ‘beware of false prophets,’ of whom He says there will be ‘many,’ who shall quite believe in their own vocation, and ‘shall say in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name?’ and who shall even be able to testify that success has attended their labours, ‘In Thy Name we have cast out devils’—to whom, nevertheless, ‘He shall profess, I never knew you: depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity’ (S. Matthew vii. 15-23). And, as intimating the

¹ ‘Whoever hearkens to these uncalled preachers runs into that very sin (of Jeroboam), for without the encouragement of being followed, they would not long continue in that course; and, therefore, they that give them that encouragement have much to answer for, and are certainly guilty of the sin of despising their true pastors, when they shall thus set up these false apostles against them. This is a guilt this age is too much concerned in. God in His mercy so timely convince us of it, as may put a stop to that confusion and impiety which breaks in so fast upon us by it’ (*Whole Duty of Man*, p. 172).

‘Be not deceived, brethren: if any man follows him that makes a schism in the Church, he shall not inherit the kingdom of God’ (S. Ignatius, *Ep. to the Philadelphians*, cap. iii.).

impossibility of an answer, the apostle says, 'How shall they preach, except they be sent?' (Rom. x. 15.)

But our Lord's own example is the strongest argument for the necessity of a mission; for, as it is written: 'No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an High Priest; but He that said unto Him, Thou art My Son, to-day have I begotten Thee. As He saith also in another place, Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec' (Heb. v. 4-6). He is always declaring that 'the Father hath sent Him,' and that He is 'not come of Himself' (S. John vii. 28; viii. 42), and thereby showing the authority on which He taught and the claim He had on their acceptance and belief. In like manner, before calling His disciples to the apostleship, He bids them 'pray the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth labourers into His harvest' (S. Matt. ix. 38), and then forthwith appoints the twelve, and says to them, 'Behold, I send you forth' (*ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω ὑμᾶς*, x. 16). After His Resurrection, He says to them, 'As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained' (S. John xx. 21-23). 'Go ye therefore, and make disciples of' (*μαθητεύσατε*) 'all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am

with you alway, even unto the end of the world' (S. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20), in which last words we see our Lord's intention that there shall be a duly authorised standing ministry to the end of time.

When Saul of Tarsus had been miraculously converted—though, as he emphatically declares, he was 'an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ' (Gal. i. 1), Who Himself had said unto him, 'I send thee' (*ἀποστέλλω*, Acts xxvi. 17)—yet when he and Barnabas are to be despatched on a special mission, 'the Holy Ghost said to the prophets and teachers at Antioch, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed' (Acts xiii. 2-4). 'Remarkable is that of the apostle (Heb. vi. 1). Observe here the doctrine of imposition of hands in ordination, as a fundamental point, as well as the doctrine of faith and repentance: "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands." As the doctrine of faith is a fundamental point, so this; that a Gospel privilege, so this. And what a point of faith it is may be seen by proposing this question which the Church, when the apostle wrote, would propose, "Whither must we go for instruction when the apostles and inspired men are gone?" "Why," say the apostles, "this is a fundamental point, that Christ hath set up a standing

ministry by ordination. Hence this evangelical promise and prediction (Isa. lxvi. 21), "And I will also take of them for priests and Levites"—not priests and scribes, as they offered sacrifices at the Temple, but as they were the standing ministry through the nation. And see verse 20, "They shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord."¹

'And it is evident unto all men diligently reading the Holy Scriptures, and ancient authors, that from the apostles' time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ's Church—Bishops, Priests, and Deacons; which offices were evermore had in such reverend estimation, that no man might presume to execute any of them, except he were first called, tried, and examined, and known to have such qualities as are requisite for the same; and also by public prayer, with imposition of hands, were approved and admitted thereunto by lawful authority.'² And 'it is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the Sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called, and sent to execute the same. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation, to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard.'³

We cannot, therefore, but wonder at the presumption of those who, pretending an inward call, but unable to

¹ Lightfoot, vol. vi. p. 225.

² Preface to the Ordinal in the Book of Common Prayer.

³ Article xxiii.

produce any credentials, not only go forth to preach without any warrant from the Church, but even seek to draw away the children of the Church to conventicles of their own. We would speak tenderly of all in error, and respect every token of genuine zeal, even when going to the extreme of fanatical enthusiasm, believing that the most misguided zeal in religion is preferable to apathetic indifference.¹ But such might well be

¹ 'This proposition I shall always maintain to be true, that the wildest opinion that ever was entertained in matters of religion is more rational than unconcern about these matters' (Paley).

'We are fallen on an age in which the chief zeal for truth is, that men have not so absolutely ceased to care for it as to keep from quarrelling about it' (Cardinal Manning).

'And may be, wildest dreams

Are but the needful preludes of the Truth' (Tennyson, *The Princess*).

'Nor may we forget that here and there among the earnest opposers of the Gospel souls are to be found which glow with a great and devoted love of truth. These are souls whom adverse circumstances have for a while bewildered and misled, but whose true home is the camp of Christ. They have not yet found the road to Damascus, but we may safely leave them to the love and providence of God' (H. P. Liddon).

'He denies not (far otherwise) that there are good men out of the Church, and good men within it, who do not seem to appreciate their characteristic privileges as its members; but he believes that they who oppose or disparage the Holy Church Catholic are good only so far as they are mercifully protected against the consequences of their own principles. . . . Is it not the fact that the most religious Churchman is he who most, and the most religious Dissenter (whether in act or spirit) he who least, conforms to his characteristic principles?' (F. Oakeley.)

'Of those who hold these false doctrines I speak not, nor presume to censure them. As sad experience, both of ourselves and of the world, compels us to acknowledge that there may be light in the head, and that yet the heart may be wallowing in darkness, so, on the other hand, it is a comfort to feel assured that errors in the head by no means imply a corresponding want of rectitude in the heart' (Hare, *Victory of Faith*, p. 178).

'In such cases, we have no concern at all with the virtues or good

taught that there is room and scope in the Church for all the zeal that can be displayed, but it must be regulated by the Church if any order is to be maintained, and be subject to the guidance and discipline of those whom Christ has appointed to rule and govern His Church. For a private man to raise an army, even with the best and most loyal intentions, would not be reckoned patriotism, but treasonable insurrection; for one unaccredited, to go forth as a king's ambassador to treat in his name with another nation without his authority, would be to usurp an honour that did not belong to him, and would bring upon him obloquy and contempt. Such have reason to fear lest it be said to them, 'Ye take too much upon you' (Num. xvi. 7); 'Who hath required this at your hands?' (Isa. i. 12).¹

qualities of false teachers, be they ever so real and great; if they corrupt the faith in any gross instance, that is sufficient for refusing communion with them, though they were otherwise bright as angels' (Waterland, iii. pp. 457, 458).

'The poison of the doctrine, by whomsoever spread, or upon whatsoever principle, is just the same: only if it comes from a man honest, pious, sober, etc., it is likely to insinuate itself deeper and spread the wider' (*Ibid.* p. 462).

¹ 'The voluntaries of our age, with their taken on callings, that have no "mitto vos," unsent, set out of themselves: no "accipite," no receiving, take it up of their own accord, make themselves what they are; sprinkle their own heads with water, lay their own hands on their own heads, and so take that to them which none ever gave them—they be "hypostles," so doth S. Paul term them; as it were, mock-apostles: and the term comes home to them, for *οἱ ὑποστολῆς* they be—"filii subtractionis" aright; work all to subtraction, to withdraw poor souls, to make them forsake their fellowship, as even then their manner was. This brand hath the apostle set on them, that we may know them and avoid them' (Bishop Andrewes' *Sermons*, vol. iii. p. 273). See also Wall's *Dissuasion from Schism* in his work on *Infant Baptism*, vol. ii. pp. 283, 284.

Men must take a very low estimate of the dignity and responsibility of the ministerial office who can thus intrude themselves into it uncalled and unsent.¹ S. Paul, though miraculously converted, though directly commissioned and charged by Christ Himself, Whom he saw and heard, yet exclaims, as though overwhelmed by the weight of so responsible a work, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' (2 Cor. ii. 16.) Even under the Law we find Moses shrinking from speaking in God's Name, even when directly commissioned to do so by God Himself, and persisting in his reluctance even after God had encouraged him to the work, till at last 'God's anger was kindled against' him (Exod. iv. 10, 14). Jeremiah also, though 'sanctified from the womb, and ordained a prophet of the nations' (Jer. i. 5), feared to undertake the prophet's responsibilities, and said, 'Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child' (verse 6). Ezekiel, too, when it was said to him, 'Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel . . . and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God,' went in bitterness, so heavy did he feel the burden to be (Ezek. ii. 3, 4; iii. 14). In the early days of the Church, the more eminent men were for their saintliness, the more they shrank from the dignities to which they were called. Some fled to deserts and mountains, fearing the laying on of

¹ 'Who requireth this at your hands? Why do you run before I am willing to send you? O how dare you take this office upon you until you are called with solemn preparation, as was Aaron? Are you not afraid to ascend that pulpit whither Luther said he never ascended (though very aged) without fear and trembling? Are you not afraid to undertake that dreadful work from which the prophets fled, the fathers avoided, the primitive pastors trembled at?' (Bishop Ken's *Prose Works*, p. 17).

the Bishop's hands more than that of the fiercest persecutors. Thus S. Ambrose fled three times from Milan, that he might not be made Bishop of that Church; S. Gregory Nazianzen also fled, and was ordained by force, and wrote that wonderful oration on the dignity of the ministry which, if read and pondered, might well deter any from rushing into the holy offices which men of such sanctity feared to undertake. S. Augustine, compelled to receive the imposition of hands, wept bitterly, saying, 'What! do you seek that I should perish?' S. Chrysostom, when he was made a bishop, says that his soul and body seemed almost rent asunder, so great was his grief and fear. S. Cyprian tells of Cornelius that, so far from seeking the office of a bishop, he was taken by force, and the office was thrust upon him.¹ S. Cuthbert, after many vain attempts, was persuaded to accept the Bishopric of Hexham, and 'with tears was induced to bow his neck to the yoke of the Episcopate.'²

But, in the present day, it is deemed by many unnecessary and uncharitable, narrow and bigoted, to insist on such a matter as this; and it is thought liberal and broad-minded to ignore religious differences and to minimise the evils of heresy and schism.³ Men

¹ Non, ut quidam, vim facit ut Episcopus fieret, sed ipse vim passus est, ut Episcopatum coactus exciperet (Ep. 55).

² Hore's *History of the Church of England*, p. 53.

³ 'We can no longer say that "Jerusalem is at unity in itself," and that the Church is but one: for it is rent into factions and parties, and Christians divide nowadays, not only upon just grounds, but we have a church within a church, and strife and hatred and nicknames of distinction between those of the same communion; and we have different sects and communions where

can be wonderfully generous with what does not belong to them, and can easily procure a reputation for tolerance and charity if they are content to surrender the Truth of God and the Faith of the Church, of which they are trustees for the next generation.¹

we are united in one common faith and interest. "These things, my brethren, ought not so to be." But it is not like to be otherwise while there is not primitive honesty and greatness of soul enough to lay before the people plainly the sin of separation about matters indifferent in their own nature. For if schism be a sin, and a damnable one, too, as the apostle affirms, then it can never be too often inculcated, that though the civil power may excuse from the penalty, it can never take off from the guilt. But while we go on at this rate with our "mollifying ointments," and are for "sewing pillows" only, and providing for the repose of sinners; while we are continually haranguing upon a false moderation, and can reject schismatics with one hand, and give them the Communion with the other, what do we else but teach the people to err upon principle, to look upon Church Communion as nowise necessary to salvation? . . . Something, it is true, may be allowed for the iniquity of the times; but sure I am that so many "smooth things" would never have been "prophesied" under the primitive warmth of Christianity. If, then, the want of union and order is the bane of all society, either spiritual or civil; if the people, by knowing nothing of antiquity, judge only of the primitive Church by the doctrines and customs they hear and see in the places where they live, and consequently conclude that the Christians of old were as moderate and indifferent about unity and order in religion as the moderns; and if this be a very dangerous and fatal mistake, then certainly it is a duty incumbent on every pastor to undeceive his flock and, both in season and out of season, to set them right in the duty of Church Communion and the sin of separation' (W. Reeves, *Essay on the Right Use of the Fathers*).

'There is a by-path as well as a broad way to destruction; and it both argues the nature and portends the doom of chaff, upon agitation to separate and divide from the wheat' (South, *Sermons*, ii. p. 150).

'Heresy, however fatal, is an outward and temporary disorder; but schism, however trivial, is an inward and lasting ill' (Wilberforce, *Five Empires*, p. 175).

¹ 'The growth of toleration is very largely due to the decay of faith' (D. G. Ritchie, *Natural Rights*).

The fact is, dissent and schism are so common that we fail to perceive their evil and sinfulness; just as duelling and drunkenness were so common a hundred years ago that even religiously disposed persons insensibly came to regard them, the one as a rule of honour, and the other as a token of hospitality. Familiarity with any condition of things is apt to deaden our sense of it.¹ And the fact that there is a chapel in almost every parish in which there is a church, and that sectarianism, or, what is worse, undenominationalism, is everywhere prevalent, is become accepted as a natural and necessary outcome of religious feelings and religious liberty. 'There be many of Gallio's temper who "care for none of these things," and who account all questions in religion, as he did, but matters

¹ 'There are instances, a physician has told me, of persons who, having been crowded with others in prisons so ill ventilated as to breed an infectious fever, have yet escaped it, from the gradual adaptation of their constitution to the noxious atmosphere they had generated. This avoids the inference so often drawn, as to the harmlessness of mischievous doctrines, from the innocent lives of the men with whom they originated. To form a correct judgment concerning the tendency of any doctrine, we should rather look at the fruit it bears in the disciple than in the teacher, for he only made it; they are made by it' (*Guesses at Truth*).

'Even follies that at first sight are odious lose their oppressiveness when we are surrounded with nothing else; as the enormous weight of the air becomes imperceptible by its pressure being universal' (Archer Butler). 'People have forgotten first principles, and have learned to look upon divisions amongst Christians as natural and right, just because they have existed for some two or three hundred years' (Prebendary Oldham, *Why are we Churchmen?*)

'It is a harder thing to repent of the sin of schism in England than it is anywhere else. For the commonness of a sin does in unthinking minds abate the sense of the guilt of it' (Wall, *Infant Baptism*, vol. ii. p. 294).

of "words and names." And by this all religions may agree together. But that were not a natural union produced by the active heat of the spirit, but a confusion rather, arising from the want of it; not a kindling together, but a freezing together, as cold congregates all bodies, however heterogeneous, together—sticks, stones, and water; but heat makes first a separation of different things, and then unites those that are of the same nature.¹ Nothing can be more commendable, because nothing can be more according to Christ's mind (S. John xvii.) than the desire and effort for unity; but it must be 'the unity of the Spirit' (Eph. iv. 4), and this will not be secured if we sacrifice the 'one Faith' (verse 5). 'The wisdom that is from above is *first pure, then peaceable*' (S. James iii. 17).

In earlier days, men were not afraid to call things by their right names; and though in such lax times as ours they may be thought intolerant and bigoted and uncharitable, we should do well to ponder their denunciations of heresy and schism, and their deprecations of self-assumed ministerial functions. Witness such words as these: 'Flee all divisions as the beginning of evils.'² 'It is a good thing to have a due

¹ Archbishop Leighton, vol. i. p. 364. 'Union in itself is no assured blessing. "That they may be one," said Christ, but it was "as We are one." The value of the union depends on its basis and its objects' (Archer Butler). 'A comprehension or coalition of religious parties is a thing very desirable in itself; and so far as it can be effected by throwing out *circumstantial*s and retaining only *essentials*, it is well worthy of every good man's thought and care; but to attempt the doing of it, relaxing the rule for essentials, or leaving us no rule at all, or what is next to none, is a wild undertaking' (Waterland, v. pp. 98, 99).

² S. Ignatius, *Ep. to the Smyrncæans*, cap. vii.

regard both to God and to the Bishop; he that honours the Bishop shall be honoured of God; but he that doeth anything without his knowledge ministers unto the devil.’¹ ‘The heretic proudly swells in his crime, pleases himself in his misconduct, deviates the children from their mother, draws away the sheep from the pastor, and disturbs the Sacraments of God.’² ‘Whosoever is separated from the Church is an adulteress, and is severed from the promises of the Church. He is an alien, he is profane, he is an enemy. He cannot now have God for his father who has not the Church for his mother. If one could escape who was without Noah’s ark, then may he escape who shall be outside the Church.’³ ‘Outside the Church there is not salvation.’⁴ ‘They that corrupt families (by sins of adultery) shall not inherit the kingdom of God; therefore, if they who do such things according to the flesh perish, how much more he who, by his pernicious doctrine, corrupts the Divine Faith, for the which Jesus was crucified? Such a man, so defiled, shall go into fire unquenchable, and so also shall he that hearkeneth unto him.’⁵ ‘Whoso forsaketh unity, violateth charity; and whosoever violateth charity, how great soever gifts he hath, he is nothing.’⁶ ‘The heretic, besides his propagating dangerous errors, subverting souls, sets himself up as a rival teacher, in opposition to the faithful minister of Christ. He weakens their hands, frustrates their pious labours,

¹ S. Ignatius, *Ep. to the Smyrnæans*, cap. ix.

² S. Cyprian *de unit. Eccles.*, p. 117.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* Ep. 73.

⁵ S. Ignat. *ad Ephes.*

⁶ S. Aug. *Serm.*, xxxviii. 21.

perverts their flocks, lessens their esteem in the eyes of their people, gives the common enemy an handle to insult and blaspheme, raises a kind of flame and war in the Church, and remotely administers to all immorality and dissoluteness of manners by taking off the influence of the best instructions of their more knowing and edifying guides. These are no slight mischiefs, but great and wide and often of long continuance, and in several respects irreparable. Therefore, let it not be thought strange if the most holy and excellent men have ever expressed the greatest detestation of all attempts of that kind.¹ ‘A life of heresy is a most wicked life; it is joining with Satan and his emissaries in a formed opposition to God and His Church, is complicated impiety and immorality.’² ‘Truth is single, yet error is the neighbour thereof; and if thou strayest ever so little a twinkling from it, that little is an abyss.’³ ‘In no wise can they be said to have charity who divide unity.’⁴ ‘Luther⁵ condemns it as an error invented by the devil that men should say that they have a talent from the Lord for teaching, and therefore must of necessity assume the office of preaching. They should wait till they are called to the ministry. If their Master wants them, He will call them; if they teach uncalled, it will not be without injury to themselves and their hearers, for Christ will not be with them. Calvin⁶ says that no man must be accounted a minister of Christ except he

¹ Waterland, iii. p. 480.

² *Ibid.* p. 485.

³ S. Ephrem. *De Fide*, Ps. lxxix.

⁴ S. Aug. on S. John, *Hom.* vii. 3.

⁵ In Gal. i. 1, tom. v. p. 215.

⁶ *Institutes*, iv. 3, 10.

be rightly called. . . . If so great a minister of Christ as S. Paul did not dare to arrogate to himself to be heard in the Church, but because He had been ordained to this office by the Lord's command, and faithfully discharged his duty . . . how great would be his impudence who should seek this honour destitute of both these qualifications!'¹

But the word 'sent' contains much encouragement and help to those who are duly commissioned to invite men to the Gospel feast. They feel that there is a Power working with them on which they may depend.² The message which they have to deliver is not their own, but His Who sent them. With stammering lips they may utter it, but if it is His Word, it shall be 'like as a fire, and as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces' (Jer. xxiii. 29); 'The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedar trees; yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Libanus' (Ps. xxix. 5); and so, going forth in His might and declaring His message, they can speak with authority and without fear, believing that His 'Word shall not return unto Him void, but shall accomplish the thing whereto He sends it' (Isa. lv. 11). This knowledge, also, is a deterrent from self-conceit. If a minister of Christ succeeds in his mission, he will remember that it is not his wisdom, nor his argument, nor his eloquence, nor his earnestness, but simply 'the voice of the Lord' which is thus 'mighty in operation' (Ps. xxix. 4). If he fails,

¹ Browne, *On the Articles*, pp. 546, 547.

² In eo quod dixit, ego mitto vos, ostendit quod virtus Illius qui eos mittebat protegeret eos (Stella, *Enarr. in cap. xxiv. Evang. Lucæ*).

or seems to fail, even while he acknowledges that the miscarriage may have been largely owing to his unfaithfulness or infirmity or lack of zeal, yet he remembers also that the work is his, but the results are God's; that it is his part faithfully to convey the message intrusted to him; and that then his responsibility ceases. As the angel said to the woman at the sepulchre, 'Go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you' (S. Matt. xxviii. 7); he had executed his commission, now it rested with them to believe his message themselves and tell it to others.

'Sent his servant' (τὸν δοῦλον αὐτοῦ). Theophylact lays stress on the article before δοῦλον, as intimating that Christ is the 'Servant' sent; but reasons have been given why this opinion seems untenable; and Goebel says: 'In the words "his servant," a specially near relation of the servant to the master has been supposed to be intimated; but this view is based on a preconceived misinterpretation of the "servant."' The article is the simple generic article (*cf.* S. Matt. viii. 9, λέγω τῷ δούλῳ μου), and the servant comes into consideration here only as bearing the message to the guests; again, as reporting his answer; and finally, as executing the commission, without his person having independent significance apart from the execution of these commissions.¹

But the personality of the 'servant' and his relation to his 'lord' is more marked than these words would

¹ *Parables of Jesus*, p. 171, quoted by Denton.

allow. Stella lays a stress on the word 'his' (*αὐτοῦ*) as distinguishing the duly authorised and commissioned minister of Christ from heretical and schismatic teachers.¹ As this point has already been treated at length, we need not dwell on it further than to note how important it is that those who receive the messages of the lord through 'his servant' should bear in mind the office which he bears. This would soon improve the whole relation with which the laity regard their minister. With many it is not the minister, but the man who is treated with respect and reverence, or with disfavour and disesteem, as the case may be. The word spoken from the pulpit is often estimated only according to the eloquence or ability of the preacher, or according to the popularity of his person or teaching; and too often the message is freely criticised as if it were an essay, and his hearers regard it as the declaration of his own opinions, and never dream that he has any authority to which they are bound to pay deference and obedience. But if he is Christ's servant, charged to deliver His message, reverence and obedience is due to him for the sake of Him Who sends him. 'He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me' (S. Luke x. 16). 'Ye received me,' S. Paul writes, 'as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus' (Gal. iv. 14). 'When ye

¹ Suus servus ille, i.e. catholicus; nam hæretici et schismatici non Dei sed diaboli sunt. . . . Hoc intelligendum est de prædicatoribus catholicis, qui veram et catholicam doctrinam prædicant; non de pseudo-prædicatoribus, qui nec a Deo missi, nec ingressi per ostium, sed ascendentes aliunde seminant errores, prædicant hæreses, schismata suscitant, de quibus per prophetam dicitur, non mittebam prophetas et ipsi currebant (*Enarr.* in cap. xiv. Luc. Evang.).

received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God' (1 Thess. ii. 13). And, after rebuking the Corinthians for their party spirit, and for unduly magnifying the persons of those who preached unto them, and for calling themselves by the names of Paul, Apollos, and Cephas (1 Cor. i. 12), he says, 'Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God' (iv. 1). The low estimate generally held of the ministerial office seems to be mainly due to two causes: one is the so-called liberal tendency of the day, which rebels against all authority and refuses to acknowledge any control in religious matters; the other is the unwillingness of the clergy duly to 'magnify their office.' Though one has well said, 'Men imagine that to magnify the spiritual claims of our office must be secretly soothing to our own pride and corruption; alas! who could boast that he stood voluntarily engaged to bear the burden of angels?'¹

'At supper time.'—Commentators refer to the similar case in Esther vi. 14, where it is said of Haman, who had already been invited to the royal banquet (v. 12), that when all was ready, 'the king's chamberlains came, and hasted to bring Haman unto the banquet which Esther had prepared.' There is much subject for thought in this expression, 'at supper time,' and it has been variously interpreted; some, as Hugo de S. Victor (if the work is his), taking it to mean generally the time of grace;² others, as Bede, making it refer to

¹ Archer Butler, *Sermons*.

² *Opp.* pars. i. cap. 18, exegetica dubia, 'hora cænæ, tempus gratiæ.'

the end of the world.¹ This latter would naturally be preferred if the 'supper' was the last meal of the day, after all work was over, and the night was come, 'when no man can work.' But, as we have seen, this interpretation of the word *δεῖπνον* must not be unduly pressed, as two of those invited pleaded their inability to come because they must even then prosecute their business in the field and in the farm. We should, perhaps, rather interpret the words by those of S. Paul (Gal. iv. 4), 'When the fulness of the time was come'; or, as it is written in Heb. i. 2, 'In these last days God hath spoken unto us by His Son.' Undoubtedly, the time of the Gospel revelation is 'the last time' (1 S. John ii. 18), and on us 'the ends of the world are come' (1 Cor. x. 11); and of the Gospel feast which Simeon declared God had 'prepared' (*ἡτοίμασας*) 'before the face of all people' (S. Luke ii. 31), it might be said, 'All things are now ready' (*ἔτοιμα*). The moral condition of the world at the time when our Lord set up His kingdom on the earth has been described by Josephus and other contemporary writers, and the picture they have given us is painted in the darkest colours. The powers of darkness had never been more busy and successful than then; it might well have seemed that the father of lies had for once spoken the truth when he said of the kingdoms of the world, 'All this power is delivered unto me' (S. Luke iv. 6).

The fortunes of the Jews had sunk to their lowest level, and in Church and State alike corruption was

¹ In Luc. Evang. exp. lib. iv. 'Quid hora cænæ, nisi finis est mundi?'

visible everywhere; the life of the nation was at its last gasp, and the eagles were already hastening to prey upon the carcase (S. Luke xvii. 37). For four hundred years the streams of inspiration had ceased to flow; and the words of the Psalmist must often have seemed to the devout Jew of those days to be literally fulfilled, 'We see not our tokens; there is not one prophet more' (Ps. lxxiv. 9). Though the Temple services were still continued, and the letter of the Law was scrupulously observed, the spirituality of worship was wellnigh extinct, and 'the weightier matters of the law' were abandoned for the 'taking tithes of mint, anise, and cummin' (S. Matt. xxiii. 23). The teachers of religion, while they were most exact and punctilious in matters of ritual and all outward observances, were as lax and corrupt in their inward character, and the very life of religion was choked by the niceties of ceremonial which was superimposed from without, instead of being the natural growth and outcome of the devout spirit within. Lightfoot (in a passage interesting, as giving a peculiar interpretation of a well-known prophecy) says: 'As that generation was the wickedest that the earth had carried, in our Saviour's character, "a wicked and adulterous generation," a "faithless and perverse" generation, a serpent and viper generation—a generation wicked beyond expression, as appears by that expression of the prophet Isaiah, "Who shall declare His generation?" that is, the generation in which He lived: so the same prophet, speaking of the very same time and generation, shows from whence the wickedness of the generation grew: "Judgment is turned away backward, and justice

standeth afar off: Truth is fallen in the streets, and Equity cannot enter: and it displeased the Lord that there was no judgment" (Isa. lix. 14, 15); which very Scriptures the Jews themselves do produce to prove that the Messiah should come in the worst of times and generations.'¹

At the same time, in the heathen world, the old religions were being exploded, and the rival sects of philosophers consented at least to sneer at and ridicule the superstitions of the multitude, while they offered nothing in their place on which men could rest their hopes. Unbelief and irreligion were rampant everywhere; and, as must ever be the case when the truths of religion are unknown or ignored, the tide of lawlessness and wickedness rose to a height which alarmed all deeper thinkers; and it was felt everywhere, both by Jew and Gentile, that now, if ever, was the time for God to interpose.²

There was, moreover, at this period, a strongly defined and universal expectation of a Deliverer who should come forth from Judæa at this time and inaugurate a golden age of righteousness, peace, and plenty.³ This

¹ Lightfoot's *Works*, vol. vi. p. 52.

² 'It is little to say that the world was left in darkness. It was not merely the darkness of midnight, which may be resting over glorious and beautiful scenery; it was the darkness of the sepulchre, athwart which, if you throw a single beam, it is only to disclose what is foul and revolting' (Melvill, *Sermons*, vol. i. p. 29).

³ Percrebuerat Oriente toto vetus et constans opinio esse in fatis, ut eo tempore Judæa profecti rerum potirentur (Sueton. *in Vespas.* c. 4). Pluribus persuasio inerat antiquis sacerdotum libris contineri, eo ipso tempore fore ut valesceret Oriens, profectique Judæa rerum potirentur, quæ ambages Vespasianum et Titum prædixerant (Tacit. *Hist.* l. v. c. 13).

hope had been kindled in the heart of the Jewish people by God's promise originally made to Abraham, and afterwards often and more fully renewed; but it had also extended to the Gentile world, so that Christ was 'the Desire of all nations,' as well as 'the Hope of Israel' (Acts xxviii. 20). It was just at this time that these deep and general longings of the heart of humanity were fulfilled.¹ As Theophylact observes, speaking of the desperately wicked condition of the world, when the disease was at its height, the Physician appeared to apply His medicine. The soul of man, faint with the famine of truth and righteousness, and nauseating the husks which was all that the world could offer, was hungering and thirsting, as it had never done before, for food suitable to its immortal capacities, and able to satisfy the infinite cravings which the void within it was continually exciting. This, then, surely was the time when 'a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined' (Isa. xxv. 6), would be most suitable and

¹ 'If there is one fact of history more certain than another, it is this fact—that two thousand years ago human nature was reduced to such a state of foetid decay by this rejection of God that a few more years would have seen the world one gigantic dunghill of corruption and death. Then the great Sacrifice took place: God, manifest in the flesh, died upon the Cross, an eternal Sacrifice to take away sin. A fresh, invigorating breeze swept over this putrifying mass of human life. Men faced for the first time the realities of existence with an unflinching faith—by pureness, by knowledge, in a divine life. The idea of sacrifice, which every nation under heaven had conceived and blindly striven to work out, was fulfilled in the great Sacrifice; and sin, no longer the rule, became for ever the bruised and battered serpent only, loathed and despised even by those who submit to its slimy trail' (J. H. Shorthouse, *Sir Percival*, pp. 251, 252).

most welcome; and for the 'weary and heavy laden' who had 'borne the burden and heat of the day,' and yearned for rest and refreshment, the proclamation that the 'supper time' was come, and 'all things were now ready,' was a Gospel indeed.

'*To say.*'—It would seem enough to simply announce the fact: no need to 'bring in,' much less to 'compel' any to the feast, as in verses 21, 23. To him that had ears to hear, it would surely suffice to *say*, 'Come.' We pause for a moment on this word 'say' (εἰπεῖν). We find the same word used elsewhere to denote the preaching the good news of the kingdom, as in S. Matt. xxi. 5, 'Say ye' (εἰπατε) 'to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee'; and in S. Luke x. 10, 11, 'Say' (εἰπατε), 'The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you,' in which passages the double power of the Word is set before us which becomes, as it is received or rejected, a 'savour of life unto life,' or 'a savour of death unto death' (2 Cor. ii. 16). It has often seemed a strangely inadequate instrument for the propagation of the Faith and the conversion of the world; but it hath 'pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe' (1 Cor. i. 21). And it has been found that, in this sense, the words of Solomon are profoundly true, 'Death and life are in the power of the tongue,'¹ for 'Faith cometh by hearing'; 'and how shall they believe on Him of Whom they have not heard? and

¹ 'The heathen observed long since (Æsch. *Prom. Vinc.* 378) ψυχῆς νοσούσης εἰσὶν ἰατροὶ λόγοι—the soul's cure is by words; and the angel said to Cornelius, "He shall speak to thee words by which thou and thy household shall be saved"' (Bishop Andrewes, *Sermons*, vol. iii. p. 295).

how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent?' (Rom. x. 14, 15). And wherever the plain facts of the Gospel story are simply and faithfully spoken, and the glad tidings that 'all things are now ready' declared, and the earnest, affectionate invitation 'Come' sounded in the ears of men, a power such as no human argument or eloquence could impart is found to accompany the word spoken, and the proudest, hardest, and most stubborn hearts are seen to yield before the simple exposition of the love of God in Christ.

'*To them that were bidden.*'—Not now for the first time, for they had already been called (*τοῖς κεκλημένοις*). The Gospel, as preached by our Lord and His apostles, was, in one sense, nothing new, but as old as the history of man. It was all wrapped up in the promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head (Gen. iii. 15); and, as S. Paul tells us, 'the Gospel was preached before unto Abraham' (*προενηγγαλίσατο τῷ Ἀβραάμ*), when God said, 'In thee shall all nations be blessed.' This promise, confirmed and amplified in succeeding ages, had become the centre of the personal and patriotic hopes of all his children; and, though in the course of ages very carnal views had been entertained of it, yet in the faith of it pious Israelites had lived and died; and, as we have seen, never was it the subject of more passionate longing than now when, though unrecognised by them, it was actually fulfilled.

Tertullian has here pointed out,¹ and Irenæus,² that

¹ *Contra Marcion*, iv. 31.

² *Contra Hæres*, iv. 36. See Archbishop Trench on this parable.

a hint is here given of the continuity of the Divine teaching, and of the unity and harmony which exists between the Old and New Testament Scriptures. Our Lord would seem to suggest in these words to His hearers—the Pharisee who had bidden Him and His fellow-guests—that the glad tidings which He was come to preach were not new, but old; that He was ‘come not to destroy, but to fulfil’ (S. Matt. v. 17); and that the kingdom of heaven which He was about to establish in the earth had its foreshadowings and prophetic intimations in the Law and the Prophets. Very gradual are the processes of the Divine operation, whether in nature or in grace. As we see few startling revolutions in the natural world, so we can discern few violent transitions in the spiritual. The night is not turned into day except through the longer or shorter interval of the dawn; and the bareness and barrenness of the winter is not changed into the beauty and fruitfulness of the summer and autumn but through the verdure and blossom of the spring. The expectations of mankind were kindled, and their hopes aroused by promises and prophecies of the coming kingdom, which ‘prepared and made ready its way.’ The Gospel which told them that ‘all things were now ready’ was but the summons to enjoy the blessedness which had already been promised to and accepted by them who ‘were bidden’ by Moses and the prophets.

‘Come.’—In vain, so far as we are concerned, would ‘the master of the house’ have made this ‘great supper,’ unless to us the personal invitation had been

given, 'Come.' The whole Gospel is contained in this one word. It is the reversal of the banishment pronounced against us when God 'drove out the man' from the garden of Eden, lest he should 'take of the Tree of Life, and eat, and live for ever' (Gen. iii. 22, 23). It is the glad tidings that the communion with God, which was the chief blessedness of Paradise, is restored. It is the triumph of Mercy over Judgment, or rather, the token that 'Mercy and Truth are met together; Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other' (Ps. lxxxv. 10). It is the voice of Him Who is 'sent to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound' (Isa. lxi. 1); to 'raise the poor out of the dust, and lift up the beggar from the dunghill, to set him among princes, and make him to inherit the throne of glory' (1 Sam. ii. 8). It is the keynote of the eternal harmony between the decree of God's predestination and the freewill of man. It is the prophecy and the foretaste of the call to heaven's blessedness, 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (S. Matt. xxv. 34).

With an earnestness and persistency most urgent and encouraging the word is reiterated, as the testimony of God's unswerving purpose of mercy, and as the pledge of love and welcome from God to man; as if, though, for his sin and disobedience, God had 'turned man to destruction,' He was never weary of showing that 'mercy rejoiced against judgment' (S. James ii. 13), saying, 'Come again, ye children of

men' (Ps. xc. 3). It is the refrain of the love-song of the Heavenly Bridegroom to His bride, 'Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away' (Cant. ii. 10, 13). It is the first word in the overture of reconciliation made by the God of mercy to the soul estranged through sin, 'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool' (Isa. i. 18). It is the burden of the oft-repeated invitations to Gospel blessings, sounding through the prophetic telephone the very words of Christ, 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price;' 'incline your ear, and come unto Me' (Isa. lv. 1, 3). It is the summons of Wisdom to the Feast of Truth, 'Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine that I have mingled' (Prov. ix. 5). It is the sweet welcome of the Saviour Himself, calling the weary and thirsty to the refreshment of peace and to the fountain of life, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (S. Matt. xi. 28); 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink' (S. John vii. 37). And as though to emphasise the invitation by repetition and reiteration, on the closing page of the Bible the word stands forth with a prominence both sweet and sublime, 'The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely' (Rev. xxii. 17). Nay, as

if neither Christ nor the Church could forbear to prolong the sweetness of its music, the closing words of that chapter are the promise of Christ, 'Surely I come quickly: Amen,' echoed by the prayer of the Church, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus' (verse 20).¹

How plain and easy God has made the way of salvation! Yet men have found many objections and obstacles, and it becomes difficult and distasteful to many, for to come to Christ implies that we come away from sin.

Some will argue thus: 'It is true that the voice of God says, "Come"; and gladly and thankfully would I obey the call and come; but I have not the power of will or of energy, so the call is to me a mockery and in vain: nay, did not the same divine lips which were ever saying, "Come," declare also the truth that qualifies and neutralises it, "No man can come unto Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him"?' (S. John vi. 44).

To this it may be answered that, as a heathen philosopher could tell us, 'Things become easy in doing them; it is not because things are difficult that we do not attempt them, but because we do not attempt them they are difficult';² and again, 'The one thing needful to be

¹ 'What a sweet echo of "Come!" The Spirit says, Come; and the Bride says, Come; and He says, "Behold, I come quickly;" and they resound again, "Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus"' (Archbishop Leighton, vol. ii. p. 104).

² Denique quem unquam ista destituere tentantem? cui non faciliora apparuerunt in actu? Non quia difficilia sunt, non audemus, sed quia non audemus, difficilia sunt (Sen. *Ep. civ.*). So S. Bernard: 'Usus tollit difficultatem, invenitque facile esse quod impossibile ante putavit' (*Ep. i.*).

good is the will to be good.'¹ And the very fact that Jesus bids us 'Come' is the guarantee that, if we will make the effort, He will 'work in us both to will and to do' (Phil. ii. 13).

As this is a matter of great moment, a few illustrations may be useful, which may show us how 'the word' of the Lord is 'with power' (S. Luke iv. 32), and how He 'makes us willing in the day of His power' (Ps. cx. 3).

When our Lord said to the man with the withered hand, 'Stretch forth thine hand,' he might have objected, as we do, 'I cannot, because it is withered.' But, believing that, because he was commanded, he would be enabled to obey, 'he stretched it out, and it was restored whole as the other' (S. Luke vi. 10). The impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, who for thirty-and-eight years had been in that case, and who was brought continually to the pool hoping to benefit from the angel's occasional visits, was himself too feeble to move to the troubled waters, and could find no neighbour to carry him. Jesus stands before him, and says, 'Rise, take up thy bed and walk.' He, too, might reasonably have excused himself from the trial, on the ground of his chronic impotency; but having faith to believe that the power would be given to the effort, 'immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked' (S. John v. 9). The ten lepers asked Jesus to 'have mercy on' them, and His answer is, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests,' that they may testify that you are cleansed. With their leprosy still

¹ Quia tibi opus est ut sis bonus? Velle (Sen. *Ep.* lxxx.).

Pars magna bonitatis est, velle fieri bonum (Ibid. *Ep.* xxxiv.).

upon them, they move forward to claim the priests' testimony that they were clean; 'and it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed' (S. Luke xvii. 14). The way of obedience is the way of salvation. When S. Peter was in the boat on the Galilean lake, and the wind was contrary, and the sea raged and threatened to overwhelm it, he saw his Lord walking on the water, and heard His voice, saying, 'It is I; be not afraid.' He answered, 'Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.' And He said, 'Come.' That word was enough: he 'came down out of the ship, and walked on the water to go to Jesus;' and so long as his faith and courage lasted, the seething waters were as solid rock beneath his feet. He Who had said to him, Come, gave him power to come even on the crests of the troubled waves (S. Matt. xiv. 22-29). When the same apostle was in prison, no condition could have seemed more helpless and hopeless. Herod was bent on pleasing the Jews, who longed for his death; and he could only suppose that he must share the recent fate of his fellow-apostle S. James, and yield his life as a seal to the truth which he had taught. He was in a prison and in a dungeon, bound fast by either arm to the arms of two soldiers who were responsible for his safety, and whose lives would be the forfeit of his escape. He could not move in his sleep without waking both his guards. The door of his dungeon was guarded by soldiers, so that no friends from without could enter to rescue him. The outer gate of his prison was closed and barred, so that all hope seemed at an end. While he slept, without any thought of his own

deliverance, a light shined in the prison, and the angel of the Lord smote him on the side to wake him, and said, 'Arise up quickly ; and he arose, and the chains fell off from his hands. Then he said, Gird thyself, and put on thy sandals. And so he did. And he said unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him, and wist not that it was true that was done by the angel ; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city ; which opened to them of his own accord : and they went out ' (Acts xii. 7-10). What, then, though we are 'so fast in prison that we cannot get forth' (Ps. lxxxviii. 8); what though the chains of evil habits fetter us so that we can 'do nothing of ourselves to help ourselves'; what though our jailor and his servants keep watchful guard over us, and our will and our energies are sunk in the heavy stupor of apathy or despair ; still God can 'burst the gates of brass, and smite the bars of iron in sunder' (Ps. cvii. 16); He can 'bring our soul out of prison, that we may give thanks unto His Name' (exlii. 7). If His light shines and illumines the darkness of our prison, and the voice of His messenger says, 'Arise up quickly and come,' then, if with unquestioning faith we will do his bidding, the chains shall fall off from our hands, and the thick door of our dungeon and the iron gate of our prison shall open before us, and we shall be free. And though when the Lord hath thus 'turned our captivity' we be 'like unto them that dream,' yet as we realise and rejoice in 'the liberty with which Christ hath made us free' (Gal. v. 1 ; S. John viii. 36),

we shall never weary in acknowledging, 'The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we rejoice' (Ps. cxxvi. 1, 4).¹

But the main obstacle to the acceptance of the Gospel invitation is irresolution, or a wilful following after sin. There are other voices besides this of Christ, which also say to us, 'Come.' 'Sinners entice us, saying, Come with us; cast in thy lot with us' (Prov. i. 10, 11-14). 'The foolish woman is clamorous; she sitteth at the door of her house, to call passengers who go right on their ways: whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith unto him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant' (ix. 13-17). The world dangles before our eyes the fascinations of its pleasures, profits, and preferments, and bids us come, pursue, and enjoy them.² And if we 'halt between two opinions' (1 Kings xviii. 21), and so 'come to no decision, the gravitation of our nature to the earth decides for us';³ or if we suffer ourselves to be dazzled with the temptations of the world, so that 'our heart is turned back, our steps

¹ 'We cannot stand, unless He gives us feet: "Son of man, stand upon thy feet" (Ezek. ii. 1). Alas! we cannot; but (verse 2) "the Spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet." . . . Neither can we arise, except He take us by the hand, as Peter took the cripple, "and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ancle-bones received strength" (Acts iii. 7)' (T. Adams, *Sermons*, vol. ii. p. 191).

² 'The flesh calls, we come; vanity calls, we flock; the world calls, we fly; Christ calls early and late, and either we do not come, or unwillingly, or late, or with no purpose to stay. How justly may He take up that complaint against us, as against the Jews, After all My promises, assurances, and performances of mercies, "you will not come unto Me, that ye might have life" (S. John v. 40)' (*Ibid.* vol. i. p. 326).

³ Maurice, *Kings and Prophets*, p. 152.

will' soon 'go out of the way' (Ps. xlv. 18), and our answer to Christ will be, 'I cannot come.'¹

'*For all things are now ready.*'—'Come'—for what? 'If God should call men to labours, it would be no wonder if they were unwilling to come; but they are called to supper and will not come. "Every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri" (2 Sam. xx. 2). The world calls us, that it may torment us; the flesh, that it may deceive us; and all follow these. But Christ calls us to supper, that we may rejoice, that we may sup with Him and be glad, and few follow Him. O if the sinner would but consider what he loses, and for what!'²

'Some fanciful men have pretended that any view to our own interest and happiness is mercenary, and takes off from the merit of purity and virtue, leaving it less worthy of esteem, as if it were not sufficient for "perfect love" to "cast off fear," but it must needs cast off hope too. . . . Those who pretend to follow virtue for virtue's sake, yet are used to heighten and magnify the delight and pleasure attending it; they plead that it is agreeable to nature, as food is to the appetite; as beauty, order, and symmetry to the eye or to the mind; that is, it carries *temporal* pleasure and satisfaction along with it. . . . The difference, then, is only this: that they who practise virtue without any regard to a life to come do it upon an inferior motive, of meaner because present consideration. . . . What I have said is illustriously

¹ Deus neminem vocat ad illud quod non potest. Ad hoc dicendum quod ibi ponitur posse pro velle; unde non possum, i.e. non volo, ad modum puerorum (Gorranus, quoted by Denton).

² Stella, *Enarr.* in cap. xiv. Lucæ Evang.

confirmed by Holy Scripture. The sublimest virtues for which Moses in Heb. xi. is justly celebrated are resolved into this, that he "had respect unto the recompense of the reward." The same thing is plainly enough intimated of Abel, Noah, Abraham, and other ancients there recited.¹ 'Many have insinuated,' says another thoughtful writer, 'that to insist on the heavenly recompense is to corrupt the purity of the religious motive. Deeper reflection would have taught them that without the heavenly future it would be impossible to preach our religion at all. Men cannot possess the *elevation* of the Christian affections on a temporary scheme, and without constant reference to a larger world as their own. Men cannot breathe the breath of heaven without the free amplitude of heaven around them. You cannot proclaim a religion built on mystical *union* with God unless you first lift men into God's world—into a world, therefore, of incorruption and eternity. Even could we exclude the notion of religion altogether, our religion could not grow without heaven and immortality as its element.'² 'The Christian life is not a life of virtue undertaken in order to win a life of a different kind—a life of glory or a life of pleasure—in a future state of existence. It is a life of righteousness, and only counts on such glory and pleasure as righteousness brings with it. It is a life of righteousness, which, most assuredly, in its origin, is not our own, but the gift of the Perfect Moral Being, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a life of righteous-

¹ Waterland, *Works*, vol. v. pp. 451-453.

² Archer Butler, *Sermons*, vol. i. p. 270.

ness begun on earth, but continued into a higher sphere, where righteousness takes new and transcendental proportions, and becomes its own crown and recompense. The real difference between us Christians and these thinkers does not turn upon the question whether virtue is its own reward, but upon the question whether this reward can be sufficiently secured within the narrow limits of an earthly existence. The real question is whether at death men cease to be. If they do not, the Christian heaven, with its crown of righteousness, is but the prolongation on a splendid scale of the ever-progressing strength and beauty of a life of virtue; the crown of righteousness is given, not to fade away on the sod that covers an earthly grave, but to beautify an undying being through the ages of eternity.¹

It is true that virtue is its own reward. 'In' (not only 'for,' but in) 'keeping God's commandments there is great reward' (Ps. xix. 11). Nay, the light of reason could testify the same: 'Askest thou what thou shouldest seek from virtue? Itself; it hath nothing better, it is its own reward';² and again, 'The value of all virtues is in themselves, for they are not exercised for reward: the reward of a thing done rightly is to have done it.'³ But it is only the virtuous soul

¹ Liddon, *Advent Sermons*, vol. ii. pp. 88-90.

² Interrogas, Quid petam ex virtute? Ipsam: nihil enim melius habet. Ipsa pretium est (Sen. *de vita beat.* c. 9).

³ Virtutum omnium pretium in ipsis est. Non enim exercentur ad præmium; recte facti, fecisse merces est (*Ibid.* Ep. 81). Fortes et sapientes viros non tam præmia sequi solere recte factorum, quam ipsa recte facere (Cic. *Orat. pro Milone*, cap. xviii.).

that can thus keenly appreciate virtue;¹ the vicious are blind to her beauty, and their will too enfeebled to rise so high as to love virtue for herself; and for such as most of us are, it is not well to discard the helps which God has given us—

‘Nor strive to wind ourselves too high
For sinful man beneath the sky.’²

As S. Chrysostom says: ‘Let us be invited to virtue by the prospect of the kingdom. For indeed he who is exceeding virtuous is induced neither by fear nor by the prospect of the kingdom, but for Christ’s sake alone, as was the case with Paul. But let us consider the blessings of the kingdom and the miseries of hell; and if thus we can regulate and school ourselves, let us in this way bring ourselves to the things that are to be practised.’³ God, Who ‘knows what is in man’ (S. John ii. 24), and ‘remembers that we are but dust’ (Ps. ciii. 14), has been pleased to stimulate us by hope of reward,⁴ and therefore we need not scruple to dwell on that hope; nay, even of our Lord Himself is it not written, ‘For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame’? (Heb. xii. 2.)

‘All things are now ready.’—Stier remarks on these words: ‘What boundless matter of exposition and preaching there is in the “all things” which the Lord

¹ See S. Francis Xavier’s hymn, ‘My God, I love Thee’ (*Hymns Ancient and Modern*, 106).

² *Christian Year* (Morning Hymn). See Canon Scott Holland’s *Creed and Character*, pp. 269-279.

³ On 2 Thess. *Hom.* ii. 3.

⁴ Novit enim pius ac misericors Pater nos non aliter suo obsequio velle vacare, nisi præmio et mercede ob oculos posito (Stella, *Enarr.* in cap. v. Evang. Lucæ.)

hath made "ready" for those whom He calls!' ¹ True indeed are those words, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him'; and though 'God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit' (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10), yet the riches are so inexhaustible that we can take no inventory of them, whether we try to reckon the riches of glory or the riches of grace. For, as Zuccolius says, 'all the mysteries of Redemption are now completed'; ² also the means of grace provided in the Church for the initiation, refreshment, growth, and renewal of the spiritual life; and more especially, the 'Great Supper' of the Holy Eucharist in which we feed on Christ Himself. Even when our Lord spoke these words, they were indeed prophetic rather than historical. For though it was 'reserved for Him to make clear all that was doubtful, to supply what had hitherto been foretasted, and to manifest what had been foretold,' ³ yet it was not till after His Ascension that it could be truly said, 'All things are now ready': the Sacrifice for sin was not yet offered; the gates of heaven were not yet opened; 'the Holy Ghost was not yet given' (S. John vii. 39); the Christian Church was not yet founded. ⁴

¹ *Words of Jesus*, vol. iii. p. 30.

² *Parata sunt omnia, siquidem completa omnia Redemptionis mysteria* (*Hom. in Evang. S. Lucæ*).

³ *Christo enim reservabatur omnia retro occulta nudare, dubitata dirigere, prolubata supplere, prædicta manifestare* (*Tertull. de Resurr. Carnis*).

⁴ *Hæc presertim Dominus de sacro illo Pane, de sancto illo Cibo, in quo consistit Illa cœna magna, vere quidem magna, in qua Cibus est Ille Quem cœli et terra capere non possunt. . . . Antea namque*

The words 'For all things are now ready' suggest to us the obligation which lies upon us to accept and appropriate the rich provisions which God has made for us. So the Church, in one of her exhortations in the Holy Communion Office, 'beseeches us, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, that we will not refuse to come thereto, being so lovingly invited by God Himself. Ye know how grievous and unkind a thing it is, when a man hath prepared a rich feast, decked his table with all kind of provision, so that there lacketh nothing but the guests to sit down; and yet they who are called (without any cause) most unthankfully refuse to come. Which of you in such a case would not be moved? Who would not think a great injury and wrong done unto him?'

They also imply that this 'great supper' which Christ has made has been made for *us*. It was with a view to our happiness that all was prepared; and therefore, when all is ready, we are invited to come. 'Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you,' our Lord says (S. John xv. 16); and so S. John, 'Not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the Propitiation for our sins' (1 S. John iv. 10). That He should have prepared this feast before we had any love for Him, nay, before we had any being except in His foreknowledge; and that, being ready, He bids us come to it, shows us how 'God first loved us' (verse 19). If, then, He has made for us this 'great

hæc hora fuerat nunquam. Nimirum in terra fundata non esset sancta Ecclesia, in qua parari detur hic Cibus. . . . Quæ autem omnia ista parata, nisi divina Sacramenta salutis? (Zuccolius, Hom. in Evang. S. Lucae.)

supper,' and called us to partake of it, how ungrateful would be a refusal to accept His bounty!

'*All things are now ready.*'—We need not, therefore, look for a further revelation,¹ nor think, as some profess to do, that Christianity will become (if it has not already become) obsolete and effete as other religions have; or that the discoveries of science or the maxims of ethics shall, by and by, supersede the religion of Christ.² As these are the last days of the world's history (Heb. i. 2), God has 'kept His best until now' (S. John ii. 11). No new books will be added to the canon of Scripture; no spiritualistic revelations will supplement the declarations of God's Word; no more refined morality, no less mysterious Creed, will be evolved out of man's ethical or religious instincts. 'All things are now ready'; the most perfect and complete revelation of Divine Truth, the most helpful and comforting of all means of grace are now set before us. What more could God have given? What more could man have required?

¹ Nobis curiositate opus non est post Christum Jesum, non inquisitione post Evangelium. Cum credimus, nihil desideramus ultra credere. Hoc enim prius credimus, non esse quod ultra reddere debeamus (Tertull. *de Resurr. Carnis*).

² 'Mr. Locke, when entreated to draw up a system of morals, returned this very wise and great answer (Locke's *Letters*, p. 566, fol. edit.): "Did the world," says he, "want a rule, I confess there could be no work so necessary, nor so commendable; but the Gospel contains so perfect a body of ethics that Reason may be excused from that inquiry, since she may find man's duty clearer and easier in Revelation than in herself." Scripture ethics are indeed the best ethics, and the only ethics that are refined and raised to a due height, set upon a firm basis, diverted to right ends, and enforced by prevailing sanctions' (Waterland, *Works*, vol. iv. p. 101).

'*Are ready*.'—The Vulgate renders these words, 'parata sunt'—have been prepared. Then 'there is no room for human merit: we cannot bring one dish unto the Lord's table, nor one dainty to that heavenly banquet; nay, we cannot bring so much as a little sauce to quicken our appetite, nor one good thought to stir us up unto a good work; but all our sufficiency must be of God, electing alone, creating alone, redeeming alone, glorifying alone.'¹ As Christ says, 'I have prepared My dinner' (S. Matt. xxii. 4), so all holy souls in every age have gratefully acknowledged that to Him is all praise and glory due. David says, 'Thou hast prepared a table before me' (Ps. xxiii. 5). Isaiah and S. Paul speak of 'the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him' (1 Cor. ii. 9), 'for the soul that waiteth for Him' (Isa. lxiv. 4). Simeon sings in his hymn of praise, 'Thy salvation Thou hast prepared before all people' (S. Luke ii. 30, 31). It only needs, since 'all things are now ready,' that we should say, 'O God, my heart is ready, my heart is ready' (Ps. lvii. 7);² and we shall 'come' thankfully and joyfully to His 'great supper' here, and find, by His mercy, a place and a portion hereafter in 'the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world' (S. Matt. xxv. 34), when the words in the apocalyptic vision shall be fulfilled, 'The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready' (Rev. xix. 7).

¹ Boys, quoted by Denton.

² Tarde velle, nolentis est (Senec. *de Benef.* lib. ii. cap. 3).

CHAPTER III

S. Luke xiv. 18.

Καὶ ἤρξαντο ἀπὸ μιᾶς παραιτεῖσθαι πάντες.

Et ceperunt simul omnes excusare.

And they all with one *consent* began to make excuse.

‘**AND.**’—The last words were, ‘Come; for all things are now ready.’ The natural sequel would be, And they all with one consent accepted the gracious invitation. We are prepared for such a response to the call, for the servant who summoned them was bidden not to ‘bring them in’ (as in verse 21), nor to ‘compel them to come in’ (as in verse 23), but simply to ‘say’ to them, ‘Come.’ They had already accepted the invitation when it was first given; it only, therefore, remained for them to be told when the supper was ready and their presence required. We can imagine with what expectation the result would be awaited; and, in some faint degree, we can imagine how, when the same summons is given now—not merely as a friendly invitation, but as a royal command from the King of Kings (S. Matt. xxii. 1-3)—a similar interest to hear how the decision goes is excited among those spiritual intelligences which watch so wistfully the issues of the invitation in each separate soul. As ‘the Master of the house’ Who has made the ‘great supper’ waits to see whether the invited guests will answer to

His call, so the holy angels who, with unflagging interest, look to see how it shall fare with the souls which they love so well, and to know which among the redeemed of mankind shall be their companions in blessedness for ever: the evil angels, too, who look with the bitterest envy on the glorious privileges vouchsafed to us but denied to them, and who strain their utmost powers of subtlety and temptation to induce men to forego and forfeit the happiness which can never be their own,—how must these wait with eager interest to hear the answer given by the guests to the invitation, ‘Come; for all things are now ready.’ Yes, good and evil angels know all this, and the knowledge excites in them marvel at God’s condescension and our privilege. But it is the next word which keeps their interest arrested and their attention strained. ‘And’: and what?—‘Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!’—‘And they all with one consent began to make excuse.’

‘*They all.*’—This word (πάντες) must not be unduly pressed, any more than the word ‘none,’ or not one (οὐδεὶς) in verse 24. ‘All’ may well be used here to denote the great majority, as in Phil. ii. 21, ‘For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.’¹ As the invitation thus far was, as we have seen, sent to the Jewish rulers, the history corresponds with the prophecy, themselves being witnesses; for when the officers whom they had sent to take Jesus

¹ Omnes dicit, i.e. pro majori parte; quia, secundum Gregorium, pauci respective salvantur (Ludolphus, *Vita Jesu Christi*, vol. ii. p. 724).

returned without Him, and pleaded as the excuse for the non-fulfilment of their mission, 'Never man spake like this Man,' 'then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?' (S. John vii. 45-48.) Though, even in this case, it was not true that 'all' of their number had rejected Him; for, even as they spoke and gave the challenge, it was answered in the breast of Nicodemus, 'being one of them,' and who, though still too timid to confess Him before his fellow-rulers, interposed to say a word, at least, in His behalf; and later, together with 'Joseph of Arimathæa, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews' (S. John xix. 38), at the time of His utmost humiliation, declared himself a disciple of the Crucified. And we are expressly told that 'among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him' (xii. 42).

'*With one consent.*'—The phrase is elliptical (*ἀπὸ μιᾶς*).¹ Several suggestions have been made to supply the missing word, as *ώρας*, *φωνῆς*, *γλωσσῆς*, *καρδίας*, *αἰτίας*, *ψυχῆς*, *γνωμῆς*. But the phrase cannot, probably, be better rendered than by the 'simul' of the Vulgate, or the 'with one consent' of the Authorised and Revised Versions. An insight is here given us by our Lord, Who 'knew all men' (S. John ii. 24, 25), and 'to Whom all hearts are open,' of that union and confederacy of evil influences which bias, all unconsciously, the actions of different men. Many and various as are the excuses which men offer for not

¹ *ἀπὸ μιᾶς*—'so *ἀπὸ τῆς ἑσῆς*, Thucyd. i. 25' (Alford).

coming to Christ, one cause is at the bottom of all such excuses.¹ The love of 'this present evil world' is the real alienating principle.² In some it takes the form of covetousness; in others, of ambition; in others, of pleasure; but in every case it is the addiction and devotion to present pursuits that hinders men from prosecuting their eternal interests. The future and the spiritual are to most men too dim, shadowy, and unsubstantial to stimulate their ardour and interest; the visible, palpable, and apparently substantial things of this present world are all that they can appreciate or care to appropriate. And where the love of the world occupies the heart, there is no room for the love of God. 'There is a law in physics that, by reason of its solidity, one body cannot occupy the place that another body occupies till that other body leaves it. It is the law of religion and of morals. Love must have all the heart or none. If it be the love of God, the love of the world must go; and so, if it be the love of the world, the love of God must go.'³ And until the heart be emptied of the world, a perfect love

¹ "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil" (Eccles. ix. 3). Solomon speaks not here "in individuo," this or that son of man, but generally, with an universal extent, the sons of men. And leaving the plural with the possessors, by a significant solecism, he names the vessel in the singular—"the heart," not hearts—as if all mankind had "cor unum in unitate malitiæ," one heart in the unity of sin: the matter of the vessel being of one polluted lump, that every man that hath a heart hath naturally an evil heart' (T. Adams, *Sermons*, vol. i. p. 261).

² 'The future hath no power over him; it is too dim, too far off, and too unsubstantial to counterpoise the gain of to-day and the pleasure of the morrow' (Cardinal Manning). 'The fundamental characteristic of heathenism is the living for the present' (Goethe).

³ M'Gill.

of God cannot exist within us. So it is written, 'He satisfieth the empty soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness' (Ps. cvii. 9). 'He hath filled the hungry with good things; but the rich He hath sent empty away' (S. Luke i. 53). So S. Augustine says, 'Love not the world: shut out the evil love of the world, that thou mayest be filled. Thou art a vessel, but art full. Pour out what thou hast, that thou mayest receive that thou hast not';¹ or, as Dr. Pusey expresses the same thought, 'Be empty of thyself, and God Himself shall fill thee.'

But we find in Scripture that the world is spoken of as an antagonistic principle; it not only takes up room in the heart which would be better occupied, but it is also a principle of evil rebelling against the sovereignty of God. And hence so much is said in Scripture about the opposition which exists between the love of the world and the love of God. 'They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world,' is our Lord's twice repeated description of His disciples (S. John xvii. 14-16). S. Paul echoes His words, 'We walk by faith, not by sight' (2 Cor. v. 7). 'We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal' (iv. 18). So S. John, 'Love not the world, neither the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the

¹ On 1 John, *Hom.* ii. 9.

Father, but is of the world' (1 S. John ii. 15, 16). So S. James, 'Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God' (iv. 4). Hence, from the earliest times, one of the questions put to catechumens before they were admitted by Holy Baptism into communion with the faithful was, 'Dost thou renounce the pomps and vanity of this wicked world?'¹ In primitive times there was, of course, a much more sharply defined line of separation between the Church and the world than there is now, at least in Christian countries. The followers of Christ were comparatively few, and the world around them was either Jewish or heathen; so that S. John writes, 'We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one' (ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ, 1 S. John v. 19). The Jews, as a people, were bitter and cruel persecutors of the Christians; the heathen world was in its principles and practices so corrupt that there could be no alliance between it and the Church. Moreover, the Church was more visibly holy than it has been since. As might be expected, in times of persecution, only those who were thoroughly in earnest were likely to profess a service which cost them 'the loss of all things'—

¹ In the earliest times the words of renunciation specified chiefly the devil, whom our Lord calls 'the prince of this world' (S. John xiv. 30); but a very usual form was such as is cited in S. Aug. *de Pecc. Mer.* lib. i. c. 19: 'Infants do profess repentance by the words of those that bring them when they do by them renounce the devil and the world.' See Neale's *Hist. of the Eastern Church*, ii. p. 945.

home, friends, substance, station—and made them liable to imprisonment, torture, and death. Therefore ‘the world’ would be a recognised term to represent all that was most contrary to the teaching and practice of Christ and Christians. Now, it is not so easy to define what the world is. The days of persecution are over, for the time at least, and the world has become, to a great degree, leavened by the Church. It has learned to patronise and profess the faith which it formerly laboured to destroy, and a large portion of ‘the field’ of the world (S. Matt. xiii. 38) has been enclosed in the Church. But while the Church has gained in numbers, she has lost in purity: not only have many entered within her pale whom the fires of persecution would have kept without, but the Church itself has become influenced by the half-heartedness and insincerity of many of her nominal members, and has been too ready to accept the low maxims and lax customs of the world instead of insisting on a resolute adherence to her laws, and a diligent aspiration towards her standard of perfection.¹ And hence the doctrine of the Church has been much corrupted, and her discipline wellnigh lost.

But it would be a fatal mistake to imagine that the world, as such, has ceased to be an enemy to the cause of God or to the souls of men. Our ‘adversary the devil,’ who is ‘the prince of this world’ (S. John xiv. 30), if he no longer rages ‘as a roaring lion’

¹ ‘Hypocrites, as vermin in summer, breed most in the time of the Church’s prosperity’ (Archbishop Leighton, on 1 S. Pet. i. 1).

(1 S. Pet. v. 8), seeks to fascinate and beguile us with his subtleties as a serpent (2 Cor. xi. 3); and the world, if it no longer uses against us the affrightments of 'a burning fiery furnace,' has only substituted in their place the allurements of 'all kinds of music' (Dan. iii. 5, 6).¹ The world in these times of peace is, in its spirit and temper, as antagonistic to Christ and His Church as it was in the days of persecution. 'As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now' (Gal. iv. 29). At present the world works in a different way and with different methods; but its profession of friendliness to the Church is more dangerous than its open and violent opposition. Its lower standard of morals; its toleration of varied phases of unbelief and misbelief; its substitution of the form for the power of religion; its assumption, loudly professed and generally acquiesced in, that the morality of the Gospel, beautiful and loving as it is, is too ethereal for everyday use, too strict to be compatible with the requirements of commercial life, too exacting for these days of busy emulation and competition,—all this makes the world a more deceitful and treacherous, but none the less (rather the more) dangerous an antagonist to the religion of Christ. The days of persecution, it is said, are over—and it is true

¹ 'Therefore is that symphony of many musicians; therefore the burning furnace, in order that both pleasure and fear may besiege the souls of those present. . . . There was fear as well as pleasure present, the one entering to assault the soul through the ears, the other by the eyes' (S. Chrys. *on the Statutes*, Hom. iv. 8).

of certain kinds of persecution; but if the world has changed its methods of opposition, it is not because 'the offence of the cross is ceased' (Gal. v. 11), but because Christians are not what they were. In this age of religious toleration (or religious indifference), let a man conscientiously make Christ his model, and His religion, as taught by Himself and His apostles, his code of morals and standard of right and wrong, and let him act consistently according to his conscience, and the world will hate him as it hated the saints of old, because he is not of the world. His consistent Christian life is a rebuke on the world's inconsistencies, and the world cannot bear to be rebuked. It may not have recourse to the flame or the gibbet, but the apostle reckons 'cruel mockings,' which are common forms of persecution, as worthy to be reckoned martyrdom as being 'stoned' or 'sawn asunder' (Heb. xi. 36, 37). The fires of persecution are not necessarily quenched because their flames are not fiercely visible; they smoulder still beneath the apparently exhausted embers; and, before the end, will doubtless revive and manifest the unextinguished malignity of the spirit of the world. Our Lord's words in this parable are a standing warning to the Church in every age that the world is the greatest obstacle to a reception of His Gospel and the salvation of men's souls.

'*With one consent.*'—The power of influence, conscious or undesigned, is taught us by the unanimity of consent with which the invited guests excused themselves. It is not necessary to suppose that 'they cast their heads together with one consent and were con-

federate against' him who called them (Ps. lxxxiii. 5). It was not a combination of active opposition, but rather the contagion of a dull inertness and indifference, which thus led to the disappointment of the maker of the feast: as in the parable of the Marriage of the King's Son (though there the active hostility of the Jewish rulers is more distinctly declared) it is said, 'They made light of it,' not so much by derision or insult as by neglect¹ (S. Matt. xxii. 5). And the prevailing influence of such lethargic indifference is frequently seen. As the zeal of one will kindle many, and in proportion as a matter is keenly taken up, the interest and enthusiasm spreads among others, so the dead level of indifference is generally depressing, and the coldness of a few will freeze many. In any congregation in church, the inattention of one will distract the attention of others, and the yawn of weariness and ennui will provoke its frequent multiplication. In any parish, if the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper be generally neglected, it needs no emissary of evil to spread disaffection or to encourage men to absent themselves: the mere example of the indifference of the majority, the power of public opinion or general custom in the place, will be quite enough to keep the number of communicants low, and will make it seem as if 'all with one consent' had agreed 'to make excuse.' To do as others do is the religion of the majority, even of those who make some profession of the service of Christ, whereas the question

¹ οἱ δὲ ἀμελήσαντες ἀπῆλθον—it is the same word as is used in Heb. ii. 3: 'How shall we escape if we neglect' (ἀμελήσαντες) 'so great salvation?'

of Christ is ever forcing itself on His true followers, 'What do ye more than others?'¹

It is no uncommon source of self-congratulation with those who neglect the means of grace and the hope of glory that they are no worse than their neighbours, as if there were security in numbers; but though 'many go in at the wide gate' and walk in 'the broad way,' it none the less 'leadeth to destruction' (S. Matt. vii. 13). And though certain sins, of commission or of omission, are customary in certain places or among certain classes, and Fashion casts over them a mantle of respectability, the usages of Society cannot alter the requirements of God's Law. When the tares are 'bound in bundles' for the burning (xiii. 30), and companions in sin find themselves companions in sorrow, there will be little enough satisfaction in having been or having done the same as their neighbours. 'The unworthy guests, as they all made excuses together for company, so they were all excluded from the "great supper" together for company; and the damned reprobates, at the last day, shall not, for all their allegations, procure either stay of judgment before sentence be pronounced, or the least mitigation thereof after.'² 'It is the world and the fashion of it that ruins souls; it is the shame of men, and the vogue of the times, that frightens men out of their consciences; and could we see the movings and reasonings of men's hearts, when Christ by the convictions of His Spirit

¹ Inter causas malorum nostrorum est, quod vivimus ad exempla; nec ratione componimur, sed consuetudine abducimur (Sen. *Epist.* c. 7).

² Bishop Sanderson, *Sermon* ii. on Prov. xxiv. 10, 12.

debates the case between Himself and the soul, we should see the non-conversion of most men traceable to this very cause, that it is the fashion to be damned.'¹

'Began.'—This word, as Goebel remarks, 'is not a mere pleonasm or superfluous.'² It introduces a thought very familiar to our experience. So long as the invitation was general, and the actual summons to the feast delayed, the invited guests seem to have regarded their inclusion in the courtesies of the host an honour and a privilege to which they gave a ready and apparently hearty response. So long as the profession of religion does not interfere with the claims of business or pleasure, nor seems to require any active and immediate effort or self-denial or pledge of self-surrender, such a profession is felt to add to a man's respectability in the eyes of his neighbours as well as to make himself at ease with his own conscience. It is not considered necessary to 'count the cost,' as our Lord, a few verses later in this chapter (verses 28-33), counsels us to do, as it is hoped that the cost will be little or nothing. And so men accept, in a sense, the Gospel invitation, and think that, in so doing, they have done all that can be required of them. But the time comes, sooner or later, when they have to show whether their religion is real or only nominal. A distinct call is heard saying, 'Come'; and, to obey this call, they must come *away from* their own ease or their ways of doing business, and come *to* real service for Christ, higher ventures of faith,

¹ South's *Sermons*, vol. iv. p. 315: 'L'habitude et l'humeur gouvernent les hommes' (Voltaire).

² *Parables of Jesus*, p. 172.

stricter acts of self-denial, and more distinct work for His Name's sake. They come to a place where two ways meet, and have to decide whether they will follow Christ by turning to the right, or to the world by following the left. It is just now and here that men 'begin to make excuse.' Hitherto their religion, such as it is, has cost them little; but now has come the crisis with issues reaching onwards into eternity, when the voice says, 'Come; for all things are now ready.' It is just here where so many newly-confirmed young people fail. They have readily made their public profession of general obedience to 'God's holy will and commandments'; but when they are called to obey that special commandment, '*This* do in remembrance of Me' (S. Luke xxii. 19), they then 'begin to make excuse.'

· '*To make excuse.*'—The shallowness and transparency of the excuses specified argues the contempt that was sought to be concealed by the simulated courtesy of the refusal. Urgency of business, or infirmity, or sickness might have been accepted as valid reasons for their absence; but, as we shall see, no such pleas were proffered. And that for such contemptible pretexts as they offered they were content to refuse the invitation to the feast, was a convincing proof how little they esteemed the honour and the happiness which the host proposed for their acceptance. Yet, possibly, for this very reason, because they made so little account of the feast to which they were called, the excuses which they severally offered may have seemed, in their own eyes, quite sufficient. In excusing themselves from accept-

ing Christ and His Gospel men often deceive themselves and delude themselves with the idea that their excuses will be accepted; whereas the excuses, so far from mitigating, really aggravate the offence of refusal.¹ Hereafter, when their eyes are opened and they are able to estimate at their true worth the salvation they have forfeited, and the sorry price for which they have bartered it away, they will wonder how they could have been so infatuated as to lose so much to gain so little, or how they could have imagined that such poor excuses would be allowed and accepted before God. At the Great Day, all excuses will be hushed in silent confusion, and those who were most ready to 'make excuse' before their Saviour will be 'speechless' before their Judge (S. Matt. xxii. 12).

But, at present, they are unable or unwilling to believe this. And often, as in the case before us, though a refusal is given to the Gospel invitation, there is an evident desire not to break off their friendship with 'the master of the house.' Theirs is not the blunt refusal of insolent contempt, but the courteous assertion of prior claims on their attention. But the

¹ Peccatum excusando committitur peccatum (Stella, *Enarr.* in cap. xiv. Evang. Lucæ). 'Excuses for sins are themselves a worse sin than that which they are brought to justify: for the sin may be of sudden passion, but the excuse is of deliberate corruption' (Archer Butler).

'And oftentimes, excusing of a fault
Doth make the fault the worse by the excuse:
As patches set upon a little breach
Discredit more in hiding of the fault
Than did the fault before it was so patch'd.'

Shakespeare, *King John*.

'Sin is never complete until it be excused' (H. Smith).

apostle's question is unanswerable, 'How shall we escape, if we *neglect* so great salvation?' And so the sequel of the excuses of these first invited guests is given in the stern sentence at the end of the parable, 'I say unto you, That none of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper' (verse 24).

CHAPTER IV

S. Luke xiv. 18.

‘Ο πρῶτος εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Ἀγρὸν ἡγόρασα, καὶ ἔχω ἀνάγκην
ἐξελθεῖν καὶ ἰδεῖν αὐτόν: ἐρωτῶ σε, ἔχε με παρητημένον.

Primus dixit ei, villam emi, et necesse habeo exire et videre
illam : rogo te, habe me excusatum.

The first said, I have bought a piece of ground (a field, R.V.),
and I must needs go and see it : I pray thee, have me excused.

A VARIETY of reasons is adduced for not accepting the invitation to the feast ; for the heart of man, by a long experience, has gained much ingenuity in making excuses. ‘The disease is epidemical ; I may say, cecumenical. We have it by kind, derived in a perpetual line of succession from the loins of our first parents’ (Gen. iii. 12, 13).¹

‘*The first.*’—Three excuses are here noted by our Lord. As the ‘supper’ was ‘a great’ one, there must have been many invited : as we see from the fact that after ‘the streets and lanes of the city’ had furnished many guests, there was still so much ‘room’ left at the table, that ‘the highways and hedges’ were made to yield many more, before the ‘house was filled’ (verses 21-23). Obviously, therefore, these three excuses are only specimens of the whole ; and, probably, it is meant to classify under these three heads the whole number of excuses offered, and to show that, in all

¹ Bishop Sanderson, *Serm.* ii. on Prov. xxiv. 10-12.

ages, under one or other of these three classes, may be comprised all who reject Christ and His Gospel. As S. Augustine says, 'These three there are, and thou canst find nothing whereby human cupidity can be tempted, but either by "the lust of the flesh, or the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life." By these three was the Lord tempted of the devil.'¹ Sadler, in his notes on this parable, objects to the way in which S. Augustine classifies the three excuses under these three heads, as being 'beside the mark, for the one was not called to part with his farm, or the other with his oxen, and assuredly the other was not required to put away his wife. No, the point of the parable is, that they were all on the face of them empty excuses.' There is, indeed, a wonderful unity pervading the whole of Scripture; but there is also, as might be expected, a considerable variety in this unity; and to unduly cramp this unity into a formulated uniformity is often to cripple and confine the truth which we seek thus to adapt and accommodate to our system.

'*Said unto him;*' that is, to the servant. It was a natural cry of the human heart that found expression in those words of the children of Israel when they were terrified by the majesty of God speaking to them on Mount Sinai: 'This great fire will consume us. If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die. Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say, and speak unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee' (Deut. v.

¹ *Concupiscentia carnis, uxorem duxi: concupiscentia oculorum, quinque juga boum emi: ambitio sæculi, villam emi* (*Serm. cxii.*).

25, 27). And God was pleased to approve of their words. 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken' (verse 28). And so, 'at sundry times, and in divers manners, God spake in time past to the fathers by the prophets:' and when 'in these last days God spake to us by His Son' (Heb. i. 1, 2), the majesty of His Divinity was veiled under the humiliation of His Humanity, for 'He took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men' (Phil. ii. 7). It was only under this covering of His majesty, this 'hiding of His power' (Habak. iii. 4), that man could bear to hear 'the Word of God' (Rev. xix. 13). But now that He is ascended up where He was before, and speaks to us, as of old, by men like ourselves, there are disadvantages as well as advantages under such a method of communication. It is easy to abuse the concession which God has yielded to our infirmities. It is true that the Master has said to His servants, 'He that heareth you, heareth Me;' but, foreseeing this very abuse, He added, 'He that despiseth you, despiseth Me' (S. Luke x. 16). When God sends His message through His servant, men are apt to forget that it *is* God's message that they hear through his lips: as South says, 'To hear the Word of God, and to hear God speaking in His Word, are things vastly different.'¹ Men come to God's House, and hear certain things commanded, and certain other things forbidden; but as they only hear the voice of a man like themselves, they think

¹ *Sermons*, vol. iv. p. 441.

they may do as they like about heeding what they hear. They will come for years regularly, Sunday after Sunday, to church, and hear frequent invitations to the Supper of the Lord, and have its necessity and benefits faithfully declared; but they think it is only the private opinion of the individual minister who thus urgently exhorts them to come, and that on such a matter they may safely judge for themselves. And in private ministerial visits, when the same and similar truths are more personally and pointedly pressed on their notice, they will 'say unto *him*' excuses which they would not dare to offer to his Master. But these men in the parable found that a refusal given to the servant was resented (verse 21) by the host, and, the invitation being his message, the discourtesy was shown to himself.

It has already been said that the low estimate with which the ministerial office is regarded is due, in great measure, to the reticence of the clergy. It is not pleasant (so open is it to misconstruction) to have to insist in the pulpit and elsewhere on the dignity of their office; and it is certain that it is the 'more excellent way' to assert its dignity by the holiness and unworldliness, the faithfulness and diligence of their own lives.¹ Nevertheless, the subject is too important to the souls of their people to allow of its being kept altogether in abeyance; and the Ember weeks of the year present favourable opportunities of presenting the matter before them. They might, at

¹ *Honorificabis autem ministerium tuum gravitate morum, maturitate consiliorum, actorum honestate* (S. Bernard, *Ep.* xxviii.).

least, be taught that the clergy have no right to appear at all in the pulpit, unless they are the authorised 'messengers of the Lord of hosts' (Mal. ii. 7); but if they are His messengers, then the people are bound to yield not only a reverent hearing, but also a dutiful obedience to their message. If this simple truth were believed, how impossible it would be that any should be found to stipulate (as has notoriously been done in the highest quarters both in this country and in Germany) that no sermon should exceed a certain length; as if God's messenger must curtail His message to suit the convenience of those to whom he is sent. We certainly cannot imagine the prophets of the Old Testament or the apostles of the New consenting to any such restrictions in the fulfilment of their office. The same impatience is manifested in these days often in town congregations, and the same disregard of the dignity of the office and the solemnity of the message. And though it must be allowed that the fault is, partly at least, attributable to the clergy themselves, yet in parishes where the parish priest has shown that he realises himself, and seeks that his people should realise the holy and heavenly bond that connects them, he is too often denounced and reviled as encouraging 'priestcraft,' and assuming 'sacerdotal' pretensions—a term which in the average lay mind seems to be regarded as synonymous with some mysterious and occult superstition, which is ignorantly derided as the enthrallment of the reason and the subjection of the conscience.

'Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of

Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God' (1 Cor. iv. 1). If the clergy were thus 'accounted of,' there would be fewer complaints of the matter or the length of their message. But the clergy must learn 'so to account of' themselves; they must seek not to please men, but God; as the apostle says, 'If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ' (Gal. i. 10); they must prepare their instructions well beforehand by prayer and study, and show that they go into the pulpit, not because they have to say something, but because they have something to say; and they must deliver their message, whether in the chapel royal or in the village church, as the ministers of Christ, intrusted by Him with a message for the souls before him which he is bound to deliver, 'whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear' (Ezek. iii. 11). And when the servant, in this spirit, says to them which are bidden, 'Come; for all things are now ready,' he at least will have 'delivered his own soul' (Ezek. iii. 19), though 'all with one consent begin to make excuse.'

'*I have bought a piece of ground*' (R.V. 'a field').—The emptiness of the excuse is transparent. If the purchase had already been completed (*ῥηγόρασα*), where was the need (*ἀνάγκη*) to 'go and see it.' If he had been so foolish and unbusiness-like as to buy a field before he had seen it, he could not alter the transaction now that the purchase was made; if he had seen it, and deliberately concluded the bargain, the former owner could not reclaim it, nor could the land change its place before the morning; and so there was no

necessity to absent himself from the feast. If, as Wetstein and others think, he had bought the field only conditionally, or, as Rosenmüller, he was only intending to purchase it, while we may commend his prudence in making sure that the bargain was an advantageous one, still his absence from the supper would be unnecessary and discourteous. In the spiritual significance of the words, we are reminded of the warning given by our Lord elsewhere that the comings of the Son of Man are often disregarded—and with the most fatal results—because men are too absorbed in their worldly pursuits to note ‘the signs of the times;’ as it is said of those in the days of Lot, ‘They bought, they sold,’ till the sudden destruction came upon Sodom (S. Luke xvii. 28, 29). Stella remarks how small was the possession on which this man had set his heart—not a city, nor a kingdom, but only ‘a field’—and adds that such is the blindness of men that, for so worthless a bargain, they will neglect that great good which is worth infinitely more than ‘the whole world’ (S. Mark viii. 36). ‘See,’ he says, ‘before thou buyest the things of this world, look and consider what they are; for if thou doest this, believe me, thou wilt never compare things temporal with things eternal. Learn from this place to diligently consider worldly things before you buy them (at such a price). So we read of a certain wise soul in the Book of Proverbs (xxxi. 16), “She considereth a field, and buyeth it”—she first considered it, and because it was a good field she bought it. So the wise merchant in the Gospel first found a treasure, and

afterwards, before he bought it, went and sold all that he had (S. Matt. xiii. 44).'¹

This man is evidently meant by our Lord to represent those who have made their way more or less well in the world; he is one who has made money and invested it, or part of it, in land. He would probably be known and respected among his neighbours as a thrifty, prudent man. He would probably be the last to think he was guilty of the sin of covetousness. Among the many sins that pollute us, that is one of the most insidious; hence our Lord says, 'Take heed, and beware of covetousness' (S. Luke xii. 15), and yet it is one of the most common.² We are sure that our Lord did not condemn this man's thrift or frugality; as South says, 'We never find the Scripture commending any prodigal but one, and him, too, only for ceasing to be so.'³ But he was condemned because his possessions were too dear to him, and he not so much possessed as was possessed by them.⁴

And covetousness is not confined to any class. The rich man whose means are abundant by inheritance or commercial success, or the poor man who has only saved his pence and hoarded his savings; the proprietor of thousands of acres, or the man who, as in

¹ *Enarr.* in cap. xiv. Lucæ. Evang.

² *Nemo se avarum esse intelligit, nemo cupidum* (Senec. *Ep.* 20).

Quemvis mediâ elige turbâ

Aut ob avaritiam, aut miserâ ambitione laborat.

Hor. Carm. lib. i. iv. 25, 26.

³ *Sermons*, vol. iii. p. 46.

⁴ *Ardua enim res est, opibus non tradere mores* (Martial, l. xi. *Epig.* 5). *Vis possidere terram? vide ne possidearis a terrâ* (S. Aug. *Serm.* liii. 2).

this parable, has 'bought a field,'—either or both may easily fall into this sin. And, as a rule (though with many exceptions), it is with the old that this sin predominates.¹ Every age of man's life has its own peculiar dangers, and Satan knows full well how to suit his temptations to our several circumstances. Pleasure is the bait which he holds out to the young, ambition to the middle-aged, profit to the old.² And it is well to remember this: as men are sometimes sadly deceived by finding the temptations which in former days were most seductive losing their power, whereupon they are inclined to believe that they have subdued and forsaken the sins to which in earlier years they were subject. It is a wise and true saying of Rochefoucauld, 'When our vices quit us, we flatter ourselves with the belief that it is we who quit them.' Too often it is not that the sin in which we formerly loved to indulge has grown hateful to us, but that we have lost the power to commit it. And when a man has outgrown the pleasures of sensuality, or when the heat of his youthful passions is past, and the temptation to that class of sins is less imperious, the bait of ambition (whether of fame or station) is just as seductive and successful as were the temptations to 'the sins of his youth'; and in the excitement of business and the haste to become rich he is just as much a captive of Satan as he was before.

¹ οἱ γὰρ νέοι ἤκιστα φιλοχρήματοι (Aris. *Rhet.* ii. 12).

² Tria retia habet diabolus in mundum extensa: ut quicquid evaserit de retibus gulæ incidat in retia inanis gloriæ, et quicquid evaserit his callidius capiatur retibus avaritiæ. De his nullus perfecte evasit (S. Chrys. *Hom.* 5 in Matt.).

And this class of temptations, in its turn, yields in the natural course to a third. When old age has dulled or deadened his animal passions, and he is no longer able to engage in the whirl of business and commerce—when he has made money and invested it—then the sin of covetousness claims his indulgence; and in the love of his money and his fear of losing it, his heart is too full to have any place left for God or religion or the interests of his soul. And so the whole history of the life of such a man may be one of continual self-indulgence and alienation from God, though the forms in which his sin develops and displays itself may be quite different at different stages of his earthly course.¹

This man, then, had made and invested his money, and his possessions are the ruling passion of his soul.² It is a strange folly, that the sin of covetousness should be the besetting sin of old age; that just as a man is about to leave the world, he should care so eagerly to increase his worldly possessions,³ though the richest 'can take nothing away with him when he

¹ 'If thou hast passed over the first heats of the day—the wantonness of youth; and the second heat—the fire of ambition; if these be quenched in thee by preventing grace, or by repenting grace, be more and more holy; for thine age will meet another sin, of covetousness or indevotion, that needs as much resistance' (Donne).

² 'Videre autem videmur priorem hominem signare avarum. genus quod villam quidem emit: et exit ut videndum, cum se immergit in avaritiæ studium' (Zuccolius, *Hom. in Evang. S. Lucæ*).

³ Mirabilis sane dementia; gravioribus enim sumptibus se onerare festinat, cum jam pervenerit quo tendebat (S. Aug., *de temp.* 246). Avaritia vero senilis quid sibi velit non intelligo: potest enim quidquam absurdius, quam quo minus viæ restat, eo plus viatici quærere? (Cic. *de Senect.* c. 18).

dieth, neither can his pomp follow him' (Ps. xlix. 17); but covetousness is a sin which has, instead of decrepitude, a rejuvenescence in old age.¹ It is strange, too, how differently men estimate the sin of covetousness from the way in which it is stigmatised everywhere in Scripture. A man may for once break the eighth commandment, 'Thou shalt not steal,' and through all his lifetime he will be branded as a reprobate; a man who for a large part of his lifetime breaks the tenth commandment, 'Thou shalt not covet,' is tolerated easily enough; if he is rich, he is universally courted; if he is poor, he is commonly respected for his prudence and thrift. But both are breakers of God's law; and the narrative of the rich man and Lazarus does not give a very cheerful view of the prospects in the other world of many who are most envied in this. There is no harm in being rich (provided that our riches have been justly gotten) so long as we are 'poor in spirit' (S. Matt. v. 3) and 'rich in good works' (1 Tim. vi. 18). There is no merit in being poor unless we are 'rich in faith' (S. James ii. 5). But whether we are rich or poor, covetousness is a damning sin, for it is a deliberate preference of the world to God; it is the setting up an idol in the heart, and dethroning God; and because 'covetousness is idolatry' (Col. iii. 5), and we cannot 'partake of the Lord's Table, and of the table of devils' (1 Cor. x. 21), we are not surprised, when we consider the spiritual

¹ Avaritia morbus senum proprius, luxuria juvenum: libidinis siquidem ignis paulatim extinguitur, et cum senectute consenescit; at avaritia augescit continuo, et cum senectute ipsâ juvenescit, quando vitia reliqua consenuerunt (Rollo, in 1 Tim. vi. 10).

application of the parable, to find this man make his possessions an excuse for his absence from the feast, and that he was ultimately excluded from tasting of his lord's supper.¹

'*And I must needs go and see it.*'—We note here the restlessness which ever accompanies the love of the world,² and the possession that takes hold of the heart that dotes on earthly possessions,³ and the miserable failure of the world to satisfy the cravings of its most diligent votaries. Stella says: 'See the folly of this man: the enjoyment of this field which he has so dearly purchased, what is it but just to behold it with his eyes? He says not, I will rejoice in it, or, I will possess it, or, I will be satisfied with it,—but I will see it. If one were very hungry, would it suffice one to see food, unless we could eat it? Would not the hunger be rather exasperated than extinguished by feasting only our eyes on that with which we longed to fill our bellies?'⁴ Solomon, the wisest of men, who 'had great possessions above all that were in Jerusalem

¹ *Dum avaritiæ incumbit hujus mundi, vere non potest adire ad Cœnam Domini. Qui enim fieri potest, ut Idololatra sedere possit ad Domini Mensam? Idololatra est avarus, quia avaritia est idolorum servitus (Zuccolius, Hom. in Evang. Lucæ). Videre autem videmur priorem hominem signare avarum genus, quod villam quidam emit; et exit ut videndum, cum se immergit in avaritiæ studium (Rolloc).*

² 'Of more than earth can earth make none possess,
And he that least

Regards this restless world shall in this world find rest.'

Quarles' *Emblems*.

³ 'We have a kind of presage, though we conceive it not, in saying of such a one, that he is a man of wealth. The speech signifies him a slave to his riches; the wealth is not the man's, but the man the wealth's' (T. Adams, *Sermons*, vol. i. p. 140).

⁴ *Enarr.* in cap. xiv., Luc. Evang.

before him' (Eccles. ii. 4, 9), asks, 'When goods increase . . . what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?' (v. 11.) This is nearly as much as the largest land proprietor can do. It may be a lovely portion of the landscape; it may contain beneath its surface mineral or other treasures; but he can but feast his eyes on it, and please himself with the proud thought, This is all my own. Well if he sometimes remember that a few years hence at the longest a few feet of ground will suffice for his last needs, and that even this little 'piece of ground' that remains to him he will not be able to 'see.' Well indeed if he be led to concern himself about the purchase of that 'field' of which our Lord speaks in another parable when He says, 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and *buyeth that field*' (S. Matt. xiii. 44).

There is an ominous ring about these words, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs' (*ἔχω ἀνάγκην*) 'go and see it.' What if in the intermediate state, when his body is buried in the earth on which he has set his heart's affections and hopes, his spirit should be permitted or obliged (as some imagine to be the case) to revisit and haunt the scene which is associated with the ruin of his soul? or what if in the eternal world, when his body and soul are reunited at the resurrection, this 'piece of ground' for which he neglected the calls of grace, and forfeited his

place and portion at the heavenly feast, should become the object of his most hateful and remorseful memories; and, as he contrasts the worthlessness of the price for which he sold his soul and bartered away his salvation, his self-reproachful cry should only be the baneful repetition of his fond excuse—‘I must needs go and see it’—though the sight is torture and agony, and the memory of my folly and infatuation is beyond the power of words to tell, I can never keep my eyes from what so sorely torments and troubles me; through all the ages of eternity, *I must needs go and see it?*’

‘*I pray thee, have me excused.*’—We contrast the courteousness and civility of this refusal with the insolence and brutal violence displayed by those invited in the later parable of the Marriage of the King’s Son, when the servants were taken, treated spitefully, and slain (S. Matt. xxii. 6). We must remember that the two parables are meant to teach the same truth; but when the former was spoken, the attitude of the rulers of the Jewish people towards our Lord, though not friendly, was far less hostile than at the close of His ministry, to which the later parable belongs; and we learn from the two how in the same heart unbelief and indifference soon develop into bitterness and opposition. History teaches this lesson very plainly and significantly. When religion loses its power, the people, though at first only careless and neglectful of its ordinances, will soon become its active and relentless antagonists. The history of the French Revolution shows us to what heights of blasphemy and persecution an unbelieving rabble will attain. It

is not enough that they 'trample under their feet the pearl of great price,' but in their mad fury they will also 'turn again and rend' those who offer it to their acceptance (S. Matt. vii. 6).

There is reason for grave anxiety about our own country at the present time. It is generally allowed that, from whatever cause, the Church has lost its hold on a large portion of the masses, or has failed to extend its holy influences in proportion to the increase of the population. 'On one Sunday of religious services in London, three millions of people were conspicuous by their absence from all places of worship: not three per cent. of the working classes, who represent the great mass of the people, are regular, or even occasional communicants.'¹ This state of things, if not remedied, will surely soon pass to an acuter stage; and, as Goethe says, 'nothing is more terrible than active ignorance.' Apathy will soon become antipathy, and negligence will become antagonism. And, to look at it only from the aspect which concerns the State, there is much to disquiet and alarm. 'As Mr. Lowell warns us, there is a poison in the sores of Lazarus against which Dives has no antidote; and the voice of Mr. George is not the only one which has been raised to prophesy that the Goths and Vandals who shall wreck these modern institutions of which we are so inordinately proud are being bred, not in the wilds of Asia, but in the slums of our great cities.'² This thought is enough to account for the

¹ Archdeacon Farrar's article on the Salvation Army (*Harper's Magazine*, May 1891).

² *Ibid.*

keen anxiety which is being felt about the religious education of the poor, and for the fear of the consequences of Church Disestablishment which some are found to advocate. Let the intellect of the rising generation be nourished and stimulated by a free and compulsory education, and the heart and conscience be left fallow, and it will soon be seen that the religious indifference of this generation will be succeeded by the religious intolerance of those that come after. Wickedness is not of such sudden growth that men become monsters all at once.¹ There is a time when religion, if not cultivated, is at least spoken of with respect and toleration, and the refusal to join in acts of public devotion is couched in the terms of this parable, 'I pray thee, have me excused;' but signs are not wanting to show us that the time is rapidly approaching when, if the masses are not won back to the Church, the refusal will be accentuated by insult and violence.²

'I pray thee, have me excused.' We note here the word 'me.' As Denton says, 'Like all sinners, he seems to cling to the belief that there is something in his case different from other men; and, however little they may deserve forbearance because of their disobedience, he prays, "have *me* excused."' He puts forth the plea of *necessity* (ἐξω ἀνάγκην); and many deceive themselves and believe that their excuses are valid,

¹ Nemo repente fuit turpissimus (Juv. ii. 83). 'It is the business of a life to be a complete sinner' (South, *Sermons*, vol. v. p. 275).

² Nam pessimus quisque asperrime rectorem patitur (*Oratio ad Caesarem*, Sallustio adscripta). 'Ignorance itself, from being merely passive at first, assumes a character of obstinate, stolid opposition' (Cheever's *Voices of Nature*, p. 111).

because their necessities are cogent. They say, in effect, religion is, no doubt, necessary, indispensably necessary; but there are persons who must be exempted from the obligation of attendance on its public services. Men of less wealth and of more leisure; or, on the other hand, men of more wealth and of less business, such as these may and ought to be particular about the way they spend their Sunday, and the support they give—if not by their presence, yet by their purse; or if not by their purse, then by their presence—to Church objects demanding and deserving help; but the claims on my time, thoughts, and labour are so numerous and onerous, that I have not the power, as yet at all events, to make such a religious profession as I could wish: ‘I pray thee, have me excused.’ So men deceive themselves to their ruin; and, as Bede says, ‘while humility sounds in their voice, pride proclaims itself in the act of their refusal.’¹ The words of Him Who spake this parable echo through the centuries of time, ‘Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her’ (S. Luke x. 41, 42). It matters not how pressing or how clamorous are the claims of this present world; for, as Archbishop Leighton says, ‘We are here “inter perituros perituri” : the things are passing which we enjoy, and we are passing who enjoy them.’² It matters not what it

¹ ‘Rogate.’ Dum enim dicit, ‘rogo,’ et tamen venire contemnit, humilitas sonat in voce, superbia in actione (in Luc. Evan. exp. lib. iv.).

² *Works*, vol. i. p. 139.

is that makes us say, 'I must needs' (ἔχω ἀνάγκην) 'go and attend to it': 'one thing' alone 'is needful' (ένός δέ έστι χρεία). 'Come; for all things are now ready.' 'Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?'¹ hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness' (Isa. lv. 2).

¹ Quod genus egestatis gravissimum est, in divitiis inopes (Sen. *Ep.* vii. 4).

CHAPTER V

S. Luke xiv. 19.

Καὶ ἕτερος εἶπε, Ζεύγη βοῶν ἡγόρασα πέντε, καὶ πορεύομαι δοκιμάσαι αὐτά· ἐρωτῶ σε, ἔχε με παρηγήμενον.

Et alter dixit, Juga boum emi quinque, et eo probare illa : rogo te, habe me excusatum.

And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them ; I pray thee, have me excused.

IF the first excuse has been rightly interpreted as that of a man who, having made money and invested it, now rests in the enjoyment of his possessions, the very sight of which is so absorbing as to keep him from the Gospel Feast, the second excuse will be that of a man who is busy in making money, and is diligently labouring to increase his abundance. Stier remarks that 'our Lord Himself, as His own expositor,' explains what He means here by His words in the other parable (S. Matt. xxii. 5), where He places the ἀγρός and ἐμπορία in connection with one another, and represents the one as excusing himself on the ground of his care of the property he has acquired, the other on the ground of the business which he is so earnestly pursuing.¹ In either case, we must observe that, in the application of our Lord's words, it matters little or nothing whether those who thus excuse themselves are wealthy or not. The cottager or small

¹ *Words of Jesus*, vol. iv. pp. 85, 86.

shopkeeper may have the same desires and pursuits as the millionaire or large landed proprietor. It would seem, indeed, as if our Lord is representing to us cases rather of the former than of the latter class. The first goes to see a newly bought 'field,' which, possibly, is the extent of his possessions; the second has bought 'five yoke of oxen' to plough his land, of which he is, perhaps, only the tenant—not a large number when compared with the number employed by Elisha, whom Elijah found 'ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen before him' (1 Kings xix. 19). In 1 Sam. xiv. 14 we read of 'half an acre of land, which a yoke of oxen might plough.' Job, before his calamity, was 'the greatest of all the men of the east,' and had 'five hundred yoke of oxen' (Job i. 3); and after 'the Lord had turned his captivity,' he had 'a thousand yoke of oxen' (xlii. 12). This man, therefore, may be taken to represent a farmer in a small way, too busy in his labour for a livelihood to cultivate his mind, as it is written in Ecclus. xxxviii. 25, 26, 'How can he get wisdom that holdeth the plough, and that glorieth in the goad, that driveth oxen, and is occupied in their labours, and whose talk is of bullocks? He giveth his mind to make furrows; and is diligent to give the kine fodder.' He is described by our Lord as active, diligent, prudent, busy about his worldly pursuits; and, at the time when he is met by the servant with the summons to the feast, on his way to prove the oxen that he has bought.¹ 'A bullock unaccustomed to the yoke' is unruly and unmanageable,

¹ 'I go' (*πορεύομαι*); 'I am on my way,' as Oosterzee renders it, 'to prove them.'

and has need to be ‘chastised,’ as Ephraim is said to be (Jer. xxxi. 18); whereas in Hosea it is said of her, made docile by instruction, ‘Ephraim is as a heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn’ (x. 11). Roberts, in his *Oriental Illustrations of Scripture*, says: ‘A bullock unaccustomed to the yoke is of no use; they therefore take the greatest precaution in making purchases of this kind, and they will never close the bargain till they have “proved” the cattle in the field. Nor will the good man trust to his own judgment; he will have his neighbours and friends to assist him. The animal will be tried in ploughing softly, deeply, strongly; and they will be put on all the required paces, and then sent home. When he who wishes to purchase is fully satisfied, he will fix a day for settling the amount, and for fetching the animal away.’¹ This man’s prudence and keen interest in his labour is shown in the fact here stated, that he will not suffer himself to be hindered, even for an hour, from making sure that the proposed purchase shall be to his profit. Pleasure must be sacrificed to business. Truly ‘the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light’ (S. Luke xvi. 8).

‘I have bought five yoke of oxen!’ The ‘five yoke of oxen’ have been variously interpreted. Meffreth, an old writer of the fifteenth century, says, ‘The Jews, ever ploughing with the five yoke of the Pentateuch, never sowed in the seed of the Lord.’² Ludolph of

¹ Quoted by Denton, *On the Gospels*.

² Sermon on the Gospel for the second Sunday after Trinity. ‘The Jew, who sought righteousness by the Law, would try what his five yoke of oxen, that is, his keeping of the Ceremonial

Saxony remarks that 'by the five yoke of oxen are meant the covetous and avaricious, too intent on the five senses and earthly things,' and that 'by the oxen who plough the earth are signified earthly things.'¹ S. Augustine also speaks of the oxen as the senses by means of which the things of earth are sought to gratify men's carnal lusts and appetites.² Others, with reference to 'the fat bulls of Basan' (Ps. xxii. 12), interpret them of the proud rulers of the world. Zuccolius says, 'The Jew is here represented, who is ever seeking to prove the letter of the five books of the Old Testament, and desires to remain under the yoke of the Law, and will not be freed by the Passion of Christ;' or, 'they who, like oxen, seek not to use reason, but like brute beasts have no understanding,'³ and only care to continue under the domination of the five senses, and, unless goaded and beaten by adversities and troubles, will not walk in the right way.'⁴ Stella also speaks of these

Law, contained in the five books of Moses, could do; and so would be excused' (Alexander Gill, *Treatise on the Creed*, Preface).

¹ *Juga boum quinque: ubi intelliguntur avari et cupidi quinque sensibus et terrenis nimis intenti; per boves, qui terram versant, terrena signantes* (*Vita Jesu Christi*, vol. ii. p. 735).

² *Quare boum dicuntur juga? Quia per sensus istos carnis terrena requiruntur. Boves enim terram versant. Sunt autem homines remoti a fide, terrenis dediti, carnalibus occupati* (*Serm. cxii.*).

³ It is Theophilus' note (*ad Autolyc.* lib. ii. § 17) that the cattle and beasts of the field were created the same day with man, to note *θηρία τινων ἀσεβούντων*, the brutish condition of some men; and that therefore the blessing was not bestowed on them, but reserved for the man which should have the dominion over them' (Hammond's *Sermons*, vol. ii. p. 570).

⁴ *At vero secundus dare videbitur illud genus hominum, qui quidem boves nullâ uti quærunt ratione, sed eâ relictâ, sub jugo quinque sensuum miserabiliter manere designant. . . Quot autem*

five yoke of oxen as representing the devil's service ; for there is none of the senses which the devil does not desire to subject to himself.¹

There are many who disparage the mystical interpretation of Scripture as fanciful and far-fetched.² Even Hooker says, 'I hold it for a most infallible rule in exposition of Sacred Scripture, that when a literal construction will stand, the farthest from the letter is commonly the worst.'³ Stier also speaks severely of 'such emptying and enfeebling expositions, in which the plain words which He speaks are turned into mere figures, revolving round a nebulous nothing.'⁴ Bacon likens the first and literal interpretation of the Bible to the first crush of the grape—which 'first crush,' however, is not wine, but, as Neale says, 'a sickly and unwholesome must.' On the other hand, Jukes says: 'Philistine

inter fideles etiam qui, ratione dimissâ, tanquam quædam feræ, nil nisi quod sensus dictat sequi student ; et, tanquam boves, nisi pungantur aculeo, virgâque cædantur, ambulare per recta non resolvant (Zuccolius, *Hom.* in *Evang.* S. Lucæ).

¹ Diaboli quinque sunt juga, quia nullus est sensus quem sibi diabolus subjicere non desiderat (*Enarr.* in cap. xiv. *Luc. Evang.*). 'By the five yoke of oxen are meant the labours and uneasiness of sinners who are slaves of their five senses ; and when a man labours in doing penance instead of sinning, he bartereth the five yoke of oxen for the single yoke of Christ' (Bellarmine, *The Seven Words*, p. 41).

² 'Luther in one place (in *Gen.* iii. p. 67) calleth allegories "spumam Scripturæ"—the froth of the Scriptures ; and in another, the allegorical sense is a beauteous harlot that enticeth idle men who think themselves in Paradise and in God's bosom when they fall upon such speculations' (Trapp, *Commentary on Job*, p. 351). 'These (mystical applications) are pretty things, but not so proper' (*Ibid.* on *Esther* i. 1). Qui quidem pleraque inepta congerunt, et nullius momenti puerilia pensitant (Stella, *Modus concionandi*, cap. iv. de sensu literal).

³ *Eccl. Pol.* Book v. c. liv. 10.

⁴ *Words of Jesus*, vol. v. p. 18.

herdsmen count wells an evil; they are deep and dangerous pits; not only sheep, but men also (so they judge) may perish in them. Have not some souls, while pretending or attempting to dig for hidden fountains, hurt themselves or others by leading them from the firm ground of the letter into uncertain and slippery quagmires of mystic nonsense, or into dry depths which yield no water? Some have slipped; the well, therefore, is to be stopped, and the stagnant pool preferred, lest some blind leader of the blind should fall into it. Who is there that, in the faith of the "deep which coucheth beneath," reckoning on a vein of living water, out of sight perhaps, but yet not far from them that seek it, has dug below the surface, and brought into view the hidden streams of the Spirit's pure and living waters, but has met with strife at the hand of Philistines for the waters, clear and refreshing though they be, which he has opened out? And the strife is from "herdsmen" who have charge of flocks, and who should know the value of living waters. But they know it not, and, like the scribes, they "take away the key"; they "neither enter themselves, and those who would enter they hinder" (see Orig. *Hom.* xiii. in Gen. and Greg. *Moral. in Job*, l. xvi. c. 16, § 23). 'Isaac called the name of the well Esek, or Contention; because they strove with him. And they digged another well, and strove for it; and he called it Sitnah, or Hatred' (Gen. xxvi. 20, 21).'¹

Possibly, sometimes the words and thoughts of Scripture have been grotesquely distorted, and figur-

¹ Jukes, *Types of Genesis*, pp. 307, 308.

ative and mystical meanings have been forced on passages which seem little able to bear them; in such cases the piety and ingenuity of the expositor have at times, perhaps, been more apparent than his common sense. But it may be doubted whether those old primitive and mediæval commentators, whose meditation was in the Scriptures day and night, did not obtain a truer insight into their deep mysteries than many modern expositors. They were not content with the rich harvest that lay on the surface, but, digging deep beneath, they found treasures of meaning more precious than gold and silver.¹

In the Epistle attributed to S. Barnabas (which those who place it latest allow to have been composed not later than A.D. 120) the mystical interpretation of Scripture is elaborately worked out. The *Similitudes* of Hermas, too, are full of mysticism, as also the Epistle of S. Clement to the Corinthians and S. Ignatius' Epistle to the Ephesians. S. Gregory the Great, in his *Morals on Job*, gives a fourfold meaning, of which one is the mystical, throughout his exposition; so this mode of interpreting Scripture has antiquity on its side. And such a method is abundantly warranted by the Scriptures themselves. The precept of Deut. xxv. 4,

¹ Deus enim noster sic ad salutem animarum divinos libros Spiritu Sancto moderatus est, ut non solum manifestis pascere, sed etiam obscuris exercere nos vellet (S. Aug. *de Div. Quæst.* qu. 53). 'The sacred Word in this sense may be considered as "hidden treasure"; its richest ore lies deep, and will not be found but by digging for it; those who sweep the surface only will leave the most valuable parts behind' (Hawkes, *Deity and Operations of the Holy Spirit*, p. 61). Levium metallorum fructus in summo est: illa opulentissima sunt, quorum in alto latet vena, assidue plenius responsura fodienti (Senec. *Ep.* 23).

'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn,' might well seem to admit of only a literal meaning, expressive of God's consideration and tender mercy over all His works. But S. Paul gives it a highly mystical interpretation: 'Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn' (1 Tim. v. 17, 18); and in another Epistle he uses the same Scripture as a proof that 'the Lord hath ordained that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel' (1 Cor. ix. 7-14). And before quoting the words from Deuteronomy he tells us that in these words 'the Law saith the same' about the maintenance of the clergy, and after quoting them, he adds, 'Doth God take care for oxen? or saith He it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes no doubt this is written, that he that plougheth should plough in hope, and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?' Equally remarkable is the same Apostle's interpretation—a most mystical one—of the history of Hagar and Ishmael in Gal. iv. 21-31, which he brings forward not merely as an illustration, or instructive comparison, but as a proof of the point on which he is arguing—'But what saith the Scripture?'—and he seems to insist that not the secondary but the primary meaning of that passage is the mystical one.¹ In like manner, S. Matthew

¹ 'His words, when once spoken, are "of no private interpretation"; that is, they do not apply merely to one passing circum-

quoting the passage in Hosea (xi. 1), 'Out of Egypt have I called My Son,' which, in its literal sense, obviously refers to the deliverance of Israel from the tyranny of Pharaoh, tells us—not that there is a prophetic *allusion* to our Lord's visit to Egypt in His infancy, but that that visit to Egypt was the *completion* of the prophecy, 'They were there till the death of Herod: that it might be *fulfilled* which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, Out of Egypt have I called My Son' (Matt. ii. 15). The Song of Solomon seems to demand a mystical interpretation to justify its place in the inspired canon.¹ These are only samples of many instances of mystical interpretation which might have been adduced; and the careful reader of Holy Scripture will see in the minuteness of many parts, as in the use of numbers which would otherwise seem superfluous, not only a warrant, but a warning that we must not be content with their superficial and literal, but must seek for their latent and mystical signification.²

But there is no need to dwell further on this point.

stance like man's words; they are the words of God, which are like those wheels in the vision of God seen by the prophet Ezekiel, which are said to have been "full of eyes round about" (x. 12); they look many ways; they mean at the same time many things' (Isaac Williams, *Sermons on the Catechism*, ii. p. 20).

¹ 'The final cause of Canticles' (it has been well said) was that it might be a field in which mysticism might disport itself' (Bishop Jebb, *Correspond. with Knox*, i. 305). Of all strange assertions, that of Renan, that mysticism of this kind is foreign to the Shemitic character, is perhaps about the strangest' (Smith's *Dict. of Bible*, iii. p. 135).

² Ratio autem divina (in Scripturis) in medullâ est, non in superficie; et plerumque æmula manifestis (Tertull. *de Resurr. Carnis*). Ac latentium divitiarum in summâ terrâ signa disposuit (Sen. *de Benef.* lib. iv. cap. 6).

The general sense of this part of the parable is clearly this—that the cares and excitements of business form in many a heart a barrier against the reception of Christ's grace, and induce men to forego their share in the rich provision of the Gospel Feast. The parable of the Sower teaches us the same under another figure: 'The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things, entering in choke the Word, and it becometh unfruitful' (S. Matt. xiii. 22).

Experience shows us only too clearly the truth of this. Of those who 'rise up early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness,' how many there are who fail to find or to make time for obeying the invitation of Christ; and hence 'it is but lost labour' (Ps. cxxvii. 2). Now Holy Scripture encourages and commands diligence in our worldly calling. It is as much a part of the fourth commandment that we should during the 'six days labour and do all that we have to do,' as it is that we should 'keep holy the Sabbath day (Exod. xx. 8, 9). It is an evangelical precept, 'Be not slothful in business' (Rom. xii. 11); but so far more pressing and important are the claims of our soul and its interests, that our Lord bids us, 'Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you' (S. John vi. 27). But everywhere we see men of all classes—the merchants on the city exchange, the farmers in the market, the labourers on the farm—so bowed down with the pressure of labour that they have no time to think of anything beyond. Their Sundays are, indeed, welcomed as days of rest, without which

temporary cessation from labour they would be unable to hold on at all; but they plead jaded minds and wearied limbs as an excuse for absenting themselves from public worship on the Lord's Day, and into their week-day business the thought of religion does not seem to enter. There are, thank God, many bright and noble exceptions to this:—

‘There are in this loud stunning tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
Of th’ everlasting chime;
Who carry music in their heart
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet,
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.’¹

And if men would only carry their religion into their business, not only would the day of rest be hallowed, and, in its turn, would hallow all the other days of the week; but the unscriptural divorce between things sacred and secular being done away, all secular things would become sacred by the aim and motive which directed them, and the place of business would become holy ground. But it is comparatively seldom so. The maxim of too many is, Religion is religion, and business is business; the two, if intermingled, only interfere one with the other; to keep them apart is the only safe method—a course which at once is more respectful to religion, which is likely to be profaned if mixed up with worldly matters, and decidedly necessary for business, on which religion is a fetter and a curb. Hence, what the wise man said is as true now as it ever

¹ *Christian Year*, S. Matthew's Day.

was, 'As a nail sticketh fast between the joinings of the stones; so doth sin stick between buying and selling' (Ecclus. xxvii. 2).¹

And even where the duties of religion are by no means ignored, when business is pervaded by holy aims, and the work of the daily calling is recognised, both theoretically and practically, as the work appointed by God, to be done with all one's might *for Him*, yet the pressure of business life is so heavy at the present day that it is a snare to many; and the calls of business are so urgent that they encroach unduly on the time which ought to be, and perhaps used to be, devoted to higher and holier objects. Think, for example, of professional or commercial life in any of our large towns and cities—the life on the stock exchange, or in the lawyer's chambers, or in the warehouse, or at the bank. At the beginning of this century the morning's post brought in the day's letters, and the day's work could be fairly planned out, and with comparatively few interruptions the business of the day could proceed. Life was not lived so fast; there were fewer excitements; there were many fewer millionaires; but there was less wear and tear, anxiety and worry, and more time for other things. Now, at all hours of the day the post is bringing in more letters; the telegraph and telephone are multiplying their tidings and messages; within a few hours we learn of events occurring at the uttermost ends of the earth; and so the day's

¹ 'The ways of trade are grown selfish to the borders of theft, and supple to the borders, if not beyond the borders, of fraud' (R. W. Emerson, *Conduct of Life*).

work is ever accumulating and ever in arrears; and when the hours of business are over, work must be taken home to be done in the evening, and the dreams of the night are haunted by the distractions of the day and the prospects of the morrow.

What wonder, then, that iron constitutions are continually breaking down? The physician is consulted, who orders immediate rest; and the answer in a hundred cases is, 'I cannot rest; my business would suffer; and, at all costs, I must keep abreast of the tide as it comes in.' The physician of the soul, if he is consulted, tells the man of business: 'If your work is so heavy, and its claims so absorbing as to leave no time for the culture of your soul and the pursuit of heavenly treasure, your business must be curtailed, and you must be content to be less, or less speedily rich. Time is short, eternity is long; the needs of the body are few and temporary; the needs of the soul are paramount and eternal. In the near future you will be forced to acknowledge that it was folly and suicide to bestow all the energies of your being that, after your departure, your executors might haply proclaim you owner of millions, and your Judge pronounce you bankrupt; it will be ruin and misery if, while your neighbours admire and envy your prudence and cleverness, God should say, "Thou fool; for so is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God" (S. Luke xii. 20, 21). "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding" (Prov. iv. 7). "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job xxviii. 28).'

The advice of both is too often thrown away ; and to the remonstrances of conscience, and the call of grace, the answer of thousands still is this: 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them ; I pray thee, have me excused.'

'*And I go to prove them.*'—Here 'the children of light' may learn a lesson from 'the children of this world.' This man must 'prove' the value of his purchase before he actually concludes the transaction. Would that we would 'prove all things' (*πάντα δοκιμάζετε*, 1 Thess. v. 21), and see whether the things we design to purchase be worth the cost and likely to satisfy our expectations ! That high and lucrative office to which the man of ambition aspires, and which he hopes at any cost to secure—let him 'go to prove' it, and see whether it be worth the labour, the solicitations, the dissimulations, the artifices which he must employ to obtain it. That brilliant speculation which tempts a man to cast all on the venture, at the risk perhaps of beggaring himself and his family, perhaps of endangering trust-money which he knows he can never repay, suppose even that he succeeds—let him 'prove' it, and see if it be not a bubble painted with the colours of the rainbow, shining only to deceive.¹ That fascinating pleasure, so sweet and luscious, with which the devil tempts his easy victim—let him 'prove' it, and see if bitter dregs be not at the bottom of the cup which sparkles at the brim.²

¹ 'Unfaithful rainbows, shining to deceive.'

I. Williams, *The Baptistery*.

² 'And life's enchanted cup but sparkles near the brim.'

Byron, *Childe Harold*.

And if when it is drained 'it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder' (Prov. xxiii. 32), is it worth his while to stake his soul for a lust of which the pleasure is but for a moment, and the shame and ruin inevitable and eternal?

But when our work is not only innocent but praiseworthy—the work which God's Providence has allotted us in the world—let us 'prove' it, and see whether God ever meant us to devote our time and strength and energies so absorbedly to a thing which is only temporary and transient. Only so far as we can carry our religion into our business, only so far as we seek God's glory in it, can it be innocent. This man who had bought 'five yoke' of oxen' might be engaged in work perfectly innocent in itself; still, it became a snare to him, because he set his heart too exclusively upon it—'the ploughing of the wicked is sin' (Prov. xxi. 4). We are to 'love God with all our strength,' and therefore so far as our business draws our thoughts and affections away from God, it must be 'lost labour.' The man who toils through the week so unintermittently that he must needs take God's Day to recruit his bodily strength for the toils of the next week, is working too hard; and if 'honesty is the best policy,' it cannot be good policy to rob God of His due; and, however scrupulous and punctilious a man may be in his business or his trade, he is palpably dishonest if he thus defrauds God. If he must lose money by sacrificing some of the time that he now spends on his business that he may devote more time to devotion and to the culture of his soul, eternity

will tell him that that time was not lost, but gained ; and if poorer for this world, he shall be richer for the next. And if, as he balances his accounts at the end of the quarter or of the year, he should find his profits smaller than before, he will feel that it is a matter for congratulation rather than for condolence if he ponders those words, which might well be printed at the top of every page of every ledger, as an useful reminder to the head of the firm and to all his subordinates, 'What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ?'¹ (S. Mark viii. 36.)

'I go.' Here was his error. The lord had said by his servant, 'Come' ; and he says, 'I go' ; as the first had answered the same summons with, 'I must needs go.' The centurion's soldiers are commended by their master, 'I say unto this man, Come, and he cometh ; and to another, Go, and he goeth' (S. Matt. viii. 9). But here the command is, 'Come,' and the answer is, 'I go.' The word is *πορεύομαι*—the same as is used in the sentence of eternal banishment, 'Depart' (*πορεύεσθε*), 'ye cursed' (S. Matt. xxv. 41). This going is ominously prophetic of that. Here it is the voluntary foregoing of the feast ; there it shall be the forfeiture of its blessedness.²

'*I pray thee, have me excused.*'—So the worldling pleads now ; but when 'the acceptable year of the Lord' shall have given place to 'the day of vengeance

¹ 'How many great counting-houses have forgotten in their books the column for the blessing or curse of God !' (Stier, *Words of Jesus*, vol. ii. p. 217.)

² *Beatus qui post illa non abiit quæ possessa onerant, amata inquinant, amissa cruciant* (S. Bernard, *Ep.* ciii.).

of our God' (Isa. lxi. 2), he will eagerly crave that which he now holds so cheap, and will cry, 'Lord, Lord, open unto us' (S. Luke xiii. 25). The invitation of grace, 'Come; for all things are *now* ready,' have an under-chime of warning, 'Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation' (2 Cor. vi. 2). The door of mercy now stands wide open, but soon 'the master of the house' will have 'risen up and shut-to the door.' God forbid that the voice which now calls us to such blessed opportunities should ever have cause to reproach and bewail our abuse of them, 'If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes' (S. Luke xix. 42).

CHAPTER V

[S. Luke xiv. 20.]

S. Luke xiv. 20.

Καὶ ἕτερος¹ εἶπε, Γυναῖκα ἔγημα,¹ καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὐ δύναμαι ἐλθεῖν.

Et alius dixit, Uxorem duxi, et ideo non possum venire.

And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

‘*AND another said.*’—It is not usual to decline an invitation to a ‘great supper’; but here we find a ‘first’ in verse 18, then another in verse 19, and here ‘another,’ as if not only urged by a common necessity to forego the honour and privilege, but as if ‘with one consent’ conspiring to affront the host. Yet it was only one and the same principle which pervaded and actuated the conduct of ‘all.’ Each had some present object in view which, for the time being, absorbed his interest and attention, and which seemed preferable to the feast to which he was bidden. At the same time, if the three were within hearing one of

¹ Bishop Chr. Wordsworth, in his *Introduction to S. Luke’s Gospel*, quotes as follows from an academical lecture delivered by him at Cambridge on the peculiarities of the matter and style of this evangelist: ‘Quod cum cæteri Evangelistæ ἄλλος pro ἕτερος, rarius ab illis usurpato adhibuerint, Lucas solus huic voci ἕτερος passim ab eo adhibitæ, rerum diversitatis cum oppositione quâdam sensuum reservaverit . . . Apud illos ἐγάμησα reperias, apud hunc autem ἔγημα, et plurima alia sincerioris Atticismi exempla. . . . Quamobrem rectissime ab Hieronymo dicitur ad Damasum scribente, “Inter omne Evangelistas Græci sermonis eruditissimus.”’

another, or even cognisant of each other's refusal, the excuses of the last two would be made more easily and with less compunction after hearing the excuse of the first. Example is a mighty power, whether for good or for evil. Fashion or custom or the prevailing opinion or habit of our own class, or of our own neighbourhood, have much to do with the earnestness or indifference with which the Gospel message is regarded.

To take a too common illustration, which the subject of this parable suggests. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the one service instituted by our Lord Himself for general use in the public assemblies of His Church. That Feast is to be celebrated especially on every Lord's Day : common sense is enough to tell us that if on the Lord's Day Christians are to assemble in the Lord's house, there can be no service so suitable or so acceptable, nay, so imperative, as the one service which the Lord ordained. In the earliest days of the Church, this was *the* service at which all assembled ; as it is written, '*Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread.*' So in the *Didaché* of the twelve apostles it is enjoined, 'On the Lord's Day do ye assemble to break bread and give thanks, after confessing your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.'¹ And the heaviest of all ecclesiastical censures and punishments, inflicted on the most scandalous offenders, was to be debarred from being present at and receiving those Holy Mysteries. But how stands the case now ? The rubric at the

¹ Cap. xiv.

beginning of the Order for the Administration of the Holy Communion still remains, indeed, in our Book of Common Prayer, witnessing to the powers of discipline possessed, though little exercised, by the Church, 'If any of you be a blasphemer of God, an hinderer or slanderer of His Word, an adulterer, or be in malice, or envy, or in any other grievous crime, repent you of your sins, or else come not to that Holy Table.' But thousands of church people, well-meaning and devout, who would think the Lord's Day ill spent by them if they failed to attend church at least once on that day, habitually neglect the one service that Christ has enjoined, and by their own choice and act, as it were, excommunicate themselves. They seem to think morning or evening prayer and a sermon on that day indispensable, but the sacrament of the Lord's Supper superfluous; while others, who do feel it incumbent on them to obey occasionally their Lord's dying command, think they have done their duty if once a month, or once a quarter, or even once a year, they come to His Table. Many such, as a rule, seldom or never attend an early Celebration, and would deem it a matter of superstition if they were reminded that to receive fasting is a rule and custom of the Church. But at a late Celebration, as soon as the sermon is over (though the sermon is preached in the course of the Communion Service, as a portion of that service), such persons troop out of church, as a matter of course, interrupting the service, which has to be suspended till the noise of their departure is over; turning their backs 'with one

consent' and without compunction on the Table of the Lord already spread for the feast to which they are invited, and seem never to hear the voice of Him Who stands 'in the midst' saying, 'Will ye also go away?' (S. John vi. 67.) 'This do in remembrance of Me' (S. Luke xxii. 19).

Why is this? We scruple not to say, it is very much fashion or custom; it is the result of the low level of public opinion about the matter.¹ Take the example of a country village, where every one knows his neighbours and fellow-worshippers at least by name and sight. Suppose that instead of the indifference towards this feast, which is too general, it were the regular custom of almost every family in the place to go to church on the Lord's Day, and, this service being made (as it ought everywhere to be made) the chief service of the day, all were in the habit, whether they received or not, of remaining to its close. If two or three, whether from indifference or necessity, went out when the sermon was ended, would not these two or three feel uncomfortable at thus leaving the church alone? Think what the power of custom would be in such a village if, instead of the remark being made by one of another, 'Such an one stayed to Holy Communion this morning'—as if it were an unusual event—it were made the subject of remark,

¹ Nec consuetudo quæ apud quosdam irrepserat impedire debet quo minus veritas prævaleat et vincat. Nam consuetudo sine veritate vetustas erroris est (S. Cypr. *Ep.* 74). Argumentum pessimi turba est. Quæramus quid optimum factum est, non quid usitatissimum; et quid nos in possessione felicitatis Æternæ constituit, non quid vulgo, veritatis pessimo interprete, probatum est (Senec. *de vita beat.* 22.)

as an uncommon occurrence, 'Such an one was not at the Celebration to-day.' Think also what is the power of example in such a parish. If the squire, or the principal farmers, or the newly confirmed, absent themselves regularly from Holy Communion, what an effect it has all over the place!¹ In their turn, the servants of the several households, the labourers on the estate or on the farms, those who are of age to

¹ 'The error of the mighty is armed with authority, and in a sort commands assent; whether in good or evil, greatness hath ever a train to follow at the heels' (Bishop Hall, *Contemplations*, ii. p. 147). 'When God shall reckon all this (the abuse of his influence) to the score of a great, illustrious, and exemplary sinner, over and above all his own personal guilt, how unspeakably greater a doom must needs pass upon him for other men's sins than could have been done only for his own! The sins of all about him are really his sins, as being committed in the strength of that which they had seen him do; wherein though his action was personal and particular, yet his influence was universal' (South, *Sermons*, vol. ii. p. 396).

'Omne animi vitium tanto conspectius in se
Crimen habet, quanto major qui peccat habetur.'

Juv. *Sat.* iii.

Vitia principis non solum ipsi concipiunt, sed etiam in civitatem infundunt, plusque exemplo quam peccato nocent (Cic. *de Leg.* 3).

'For what am I? What profit in my name
Of greatest knight? . . .
To make me worse by making my sin known?
Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?'

Tennyson, *Elaine*.

'Aristotle calls great men "loquentes leges," speaking laws. Inferiors often set their eyes to supply the place of their ears, and rather look to see their duties than to hear them. All should live by precept, but most will live by precedent. A superior, therefore, should teach men to take the measure of his greatness by his goodness. These two should be of an even length, of an even pace' (T. Adams, *Sermons*, vol. i. p. 142). Pudorem enim rei tollit magnitudo peccantium: et desinet esse probri loco commune maledictum (Senec. *de Benef.* lib. iii. c. 16).

be confirmed, will, for the most part, do the same.¹ The majority are only followers whither others lead them, and there is no greater tyranny than that exercised by the public opinion and general feeling of a place. S. Chrysostom, writing on this very point, and speaking of the degeneracy of the Christians of his day from the pious observances of earlier and purer ages, says, 'Oh! the force of custom and prejudice. In vain is the daily Sacrifice; in vain do we stand before the Altar: there is no one to partake!'² Just as if one sheep breaks a fence and strays from the pasture, whether it be to the barren thoroughfare or to the brink of a precipice, thither the flock will follow, so those words of the prophet are every day proved true, '*All we like sheep have gone astray*' (Isa. liii. 6).³ If a first prays to be excused, and refuses to come to the

¹ 'In a multitude it is ever seen, as in a beast, that the body follows the head. Of all others, great men had need look to their ways; it is in them, as in figures, one stands for a thousand' (Bishop Hall's *Contemplations*, book xii. cont. ii.).

² On the Epist. to the Ephesians, *Hom.* iii.

³ *Ne pecorum ritu sequamur antecedentem gregem, pergentes non qua eundum est, sed qua itur* (Sen. *de vitâ beat.* c. 1). '*All we like sheep have gone astray*'; yea, the prophet to the collective universal adds a distinctive, '*every man to his own way.*' They agree in this, that they wander, though they differ in their several ways. There is an inbred proneness to stray in them all, more than in sheep which are creatures naturally wandering, for each man has '*his own way.*' And this is our folly, that we flatter ourselves by comparison, and every one is pleased with himself, because he is free from some wanderings of others; not considering that he is a wanderer too, though in another way, as those he looks on have theirs. And as men agree in wandering, though they differ in their way, so those ways agree in this—that they lead unto misery, and shall end in that' (Archbishop Leighton, *Works*, vol. i. p. 345).

Feast, he will be sure to be followed by another, and yet another. Who, then, can tell the issues of his actions? The man who neglects the ordinances of religion through indifference or contempt, besides the damage done to his own soul, may be responsible for the unholy lives and unhappy deaths of many more than he dreams.

But it will be objected, What is the good of a religion of fashion? and, more particularly, will it not be productive of more evil than good, if the people are taught to come, promiscuously and as a matter of course, to be present at the celebration of those holy mysteries? Look, it will be said, at the practice of continental nations, where, as a rule, the people come, or are expected to come to Mass on Sunday morning, and then devote the rest of the day to pleasure or business, and often to excess and riot? The answer is this: A religious observance which has its origin in following example or custom is certainly better than an irreligious non-observance of the ordinances of Christ and His Church. It is something at least if the people can be brought within the Church's walls, and thus come into Christ's Presence, hear the Word of God read and preached, and learn to regard their Father's House as His children's home. Our Lord did not reject the multitude who 'thronged and pressed' Him, though only one savingly 'touched' Him (S. Luke viii. 45, 46). At His crucifixion, 'the people stood beholding' (xxiii. 35); and though many continued to revile Him, many also of those who had 'come together to that sight, beholding the things

which were done, smote their breasts, and returned' (S. Luke xxiii. 48)—some of them, we may trust, to ponder and pray over what they had seen. And we cannot but hope that, as He has promised, 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me' (S. John xii. 32), He will 'draw' many by the invisible workings of His grace, as He is 'lifted up' in the Celebration of His Sacrament and in the preaching of His Word.¹

It is true that there is danger of formality, irreverence, and profaneness in drawing near to those Holy Mysteries; but is there not danger also (though little recognised or regarded by many churchgoers) in coming to church at all? If Christ's promise is true, that 'where two or three are gathered together in His Name, there is He in the midst of them' (S. Matt. xviii. 20); if people are not benefited by coming into that Presence, must not they receive harm? If the Word preached be not 'a savour of life unto life,' must it not be 'a savour of death unto death'? (2 Cor. ii. 16). Yet the very persons who make the objection above noted see no danger in coming themselves or in exhorting others to come promiscuously to church.

Besides, a faithful and diligent pastor, if he saw his people flocking to the Celebration of that Holy Sacrament, would feel that in the exhortations in the Holy Communion Office the warnings are many and solemn against any irreverence or profane intrusion; and, from time to time, both from the pulpit and in his house-to-house visitation, he would make it the subject of his

¹ 'Before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified, among you' (Gal. iii. 1).

teaching and exhortation. Moreover, we may not despair of a revival, in the future, of the discipline, as there has been in the recent past, of the doctrine of the Church.¹ And if public opinion should be so elevated as to make it a regular and chief observance of the Lord's Day, that all should be present at the one service which our Lord ordained, it would be easy, as it would certainly be necessary, to enforce obedience to the first rubric in the Communion Office (now generally neglected): 'So many as intend to partake of the Holy Communion shall signify their names to the curate at least some time the day before.' Thus ample opportunity would be given for warnings against coming unprepared, and also for advice as to the frequency with which the communicants should severally receive.²

Immense harm has been done, though most unintentionally, in former days by the clergy 'fencing the Table' as they did. Before the Sacramental system of the Church was brought into prominence half a century ago, the Lord's Supper was, in too many cases, regarded as a superfluity, or, if not treated with this profane irreverence, it was regarded as so perilous and awful a mystery, and an unworthy reception of it as so damnable, that only the most perfect must venture to draw near. 'The poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind,' instead of being bidden to come and expect a welcome, were bidden to forbear at their peril. And thus people

¹ *Doctrinæ index disciplina est* (Tertull. *de præscrip. hæc.* c. 42).

² 'It is not presumptuous to receive often, but to receive unworthily, though but once in a whole life' (S. Chrys. on 1 Tim. *Hom.* v.).

have been led to dread that Holy Sacrament as a stumblingblock which Christ ordained to be received 'to our endless comfort.' Not so Christ Himself; the keynote of this parable (the application of which to the Lord's Supper is warranted by the use of it by the Church in one of her exhortations in the Communion Office) is 'Come,' 'Bring them in,' 'Compel them to come in;' and the sin and the ruin of those who were invited to the feast was that, one after another, they refused to come.

We have dwelt longer on the words, 'And another said,' than, perhaps, an exposition of the text requires; but as the design of this book is to make the exposition practical as well as exegetical, it is trusted that no apology is needed. We may now proceed to the consideration of the third excuse.

'I have married a wife.'—We are sure that He Who Himself at the beginning 'instituted the holy estate of matrimony in the time of man's innocency, and Who adorned and beautified it with His Presence and first miracle that He wrought in Cana of Galilee, and has made it such an excellent mystery that thereby is signified unto us the mystical union between Himself and His Church,' did not intend to cast any dishonour on the married state. 'Marriage is honourable in all' (Heb. xiii. 4), and 'forbidding to marry' is denounced by the Holy Spirit as the teaching of some who would 'depart from the Faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils' (1 Tim. iv. 1-3). And this is a suitable place to bring forward a point much noticed by commentators, that in all these three excuses there

is nothing alleged which is wrong in itself, but only the abuse of things of which the use is, in itself, innocent and even appointed by God. Our Lord is not pronouncing any censure on the possession of landed property, or the pursuit of commerce, or the pleasures of married life; but on the abuse of these things¹ by making idols of them, to which is transferred the devotion and homage due only to Himself. He is giving the much needed warning that men are able more easily to refrain from the invasion of the rights of others than to use their own with moderation,² and that the greatest wealth is the contempt of riches;³ the most necessary business, to sit loose to worldly things;⁴ the truest happiness, to spurn pleasures.⁵ When He speaks of those before the Flood who were involved in that general judgment, He specifies against them the fact that they were 'marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the Ark, and the flood came and took them all away,' and adds, 'So shall also the coming of the Son of Man be' (S. Matt. xxiv. 38, 39). But it was not the 'marrying and giving in

¹ τὸ μὲν πάρεργον, ἔργον ὥς, ἡγούμενοι·
τὸ δ' ἔργον, ὥς πάρεργον, ἐκπονούμενοι.

Agatho *apud Clem. Strom.* l. 5.

² Certum est facilius quemvis hominem a re alienâ se continere posse, quam suis parce et moderate uti (Stella, *Enarr.* in cap. xiv. Luc. Evang.).

³ εἰ βούλει πλουτεῖν, καταφρόνει πλούτον (S. Chrys. in Ep. 2. *ad Cor.* Hom. xii.).

⁴ Pecuniam in loco negligere, maxumum interdum est lucrum (Ter. *Adelph.* Act ii. Sc. 4).

⁵ Quæ major voluptas, quam fastidium ipsius voluptatis? (Ter-tull. *de spectac. litur.*). Cui vera voluptas est, voluptatum contemptio (Sen. *de vit. beat.* c. 2).

marriage' that He condemned in the past judgment or shall punish in the second, but only the being absorbed in worldly enjoyments, business, or pleasure,¹ without any care for or provision against the judgments threatened. It is the same here; this third refuses the invitation to the 'Great Supper' because he is recently married—'I have married a wife; and therefore I cannot come.'

This might and would have been a legitimate excuse for staying at home on certain occasions.² By a special command of God it was ordered that 'when a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: but he shall be free at home for one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken' (Deut. xxiv. 5). But what was there to prevent his going for one afternoon or evening to a feast, which he had already pledged himself to attend? It has been asked, Why should he not have taken his wife with him to the feast? It is true that in Palestine, at that time, there were not the same restrictions laid upon women as generally prevailed in Oriental countries; and that women were allowed to attend feasts with men is proved by the account of the marriage feast at Cana,

¹ 'How few are they who can carry, as they say, a full cup even; who can have digestion strong enough for the right use of great places and estates; who can bear preferment without pride, and riches without covetousness, and ease without wantonness!' (Archbishop Leighton, on 1 S. Peter i. 4.)

² Commentators remind us how Cræsus excused his son from a great hunting party because he was newly married, and this for the present naturally occupied him, to the exclusion of other things: *νεόγαμός τε γάρ ἐστι, καὶ ταῦτα οἱ νῦν μέλει* (Herod. i. 36).

at which the Blessed Virgin was present (S. John ii. 1). But there is no hint given in this parable of any attendance of women on this occasion; what argument there is, seems to be against it, for the Greek word for 'those men that were bidden' (verse 24) signifies those of the male sex (*ἀνδρῶν*). The observation is, however, quite pertinent to our own times. In the Gospel there is no distinction in such matters of male and female (Gal. iii. 28); both alike are welcome to the Gospel offer, and both are invited to the Gospel Feast. And this excuse has been forestalled by the Church in her express direction to them that are married: 'It is convenient that the new-married persons should receive the Holy Communion at the time of their marriage, or at the first opportunity after their marriage'¹ (where, incidentally, it is implied that none shall marry till they have been confirmed, and that marriages shall take place early in the day). But though the practice of the newly married receiving the Supper of the Lord on their wedding day is in course of revival, yet at how few marriages is this order complied with! Many people seem to regard such an idea as unseemly as well as unsuitable; and yet what happier or holier marriage festival was ever celebrated than that at Cana in Galilee, to which 'both Jesus was called and His disciples' (S. John ii. 2)? or how better could we ensure that our 'stock of earthly gladness' shall be 'transformed to heavenly wine'?² What is more fit than for those who are now married one to another to

¹ Rubric at the end of the Form of Solemnization of Matrimony.

² *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, 579.

marry both their souls to Christ? And as in their marriage they represent 'the great mystery of Christ's love for His Church, so would it rarely moralise that allegory if they did now in the Sacrament commemorate Jesus His obliging condescension in espousing His Church, and laying down His life for it. Nor could the married persons make any more auspicious beginning of their marriage than by receiving the Holy Communion to bind their souls to the performance of all holiness, which is the certain means to make them live happily together; especially since in this Blessed Sacrament the grace of God is imparted to those who do devoutly receive It, whereby they are enabled to live in the fear of God.'¹ And, as Hooker says, 'to end the solemnity of marriage with receiving the Blessed Sacrament is a custom so religious and holy, that if the Church of England is blameable in this respect, it is not for suffering it so much, but rather for not providing that it may be more put in use.'²

But our Lord here teaches us that domestic comforts and cares are often an hindrance to the Gospel invitation.³ And in the verses which succeed this parable, He seems to enforce and emphasise this danger, for it immediately follows: 'And there went great multitudes with Him: and He turned, and said unto them, If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea,

¹ Dean Comber.

² *Eccl. Polit.* v. 73, 8.

³ *Raræ felicitatis est, a felicitate non vinci* (S. Aug. *Ver. Dom.* Serm. xiii.).

and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple' (verses 25, 26). 'The object of religion is not to destroy, nor to restrain, but to strengthen and expand and elevate our natural affections. While it produces in us superior love to God, it does not diminish, but increases, our love to man.'¹ But Christ must have the first place in our affections; and so sure and settled must be His sovereignty in our heart, that every domestic tie must be snapped at His command, and every family affection subordinated to our love for Him; so that if the command were given, 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land which I will show thee' (Gen. xii. 1); or, 'Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, . . . and offer him up' (xxii. 2), with unquestioning, unfaltering obedience we should be ready to prove that we loved Him more than them. We must 'hate' all in comparison with our love for Him, and this 'holy hatred' will be a cure for all excessive love for others.² Hence the excuse here is disallowed, as we see in verse 34.

'And therefore I cannot come.'—We note here the difference in tone of this man's answer from those that have preceded it. He says not, 'I pray thee, have me excused,' as the two former—in whose words we trace some sense of shame and regret at the poverty of their excuse; but here is no compunction, nor feeling of shame, nor fear of giving offence; to himself at least, the reason for his refusal seems sufficient and unexcep-

¹ Landel.

² His omnibus mederi poterat sanctum illud odium, v. 26 (Bengel).

tionable;¹ 'therefore I cannot come.' So it is now. When men are invited to Holy Communion, or to a closer walk with God, and a cultivation of the religious life and a care for their souls, they have some misgivings in proffering as an excuse their devotion to their worldly estate or business; but family reasons are reckoned unanswerable. Young married people, who have before their marriage been regular at church and at Holy Communion, will sometimes first become irregular in their attendance, and then regular in their absence. When the wife is unable to come, the husband does not like to come without her, and so both stay at home, and in time become accustomed to do so. When the wife becomes a mother, it is more difficult for her to come, and the difficulty increases as the family increases; and though they find it quite possible to go out for a day's marketing or a day's visiting, and can either take the children with them, or leave them under a neighbour's care, no such arrangement seems practicable or necessary to enable them to go to an early Celebration or a later service; the exhortation to the exercise of such spiritual privileges and duties is met with the answer, 'I cannot come.'

The love of our family and kindred is so natural and laudable that we might expect that Satan would try to pervert it, and so make it an instrument of evil; and it is well to bear in mind that, as ours is a fallen nature, those feelings and desires which are the

¹ Hic excusator, quo speciosorem et honestiorem videtur causam, eo est cæteris importunior (Bengel).

most natural often bear the most evident traces of the fall.

‘Unto some meek souls is given
To have the things they love, and to rejoice :
Such as therein forget not things of heaven,
As using, not abusing.’¹

But it is difficult to enjoy the things of earth without thereby losing our taste for spiritual joys, and the comforts of home endear it to us too much ; hence it is easy for Satan to wound us through our home affections. It was through Eve that the serpent tempted Adam to transgression ; and, as M. Henry observes, ‘Adam’s excuse was, The woman whom Thou gavest me persuaded me to eat : this here was, The woman persuaded me not to eat.’ When Satan had received permission to assault Job, he took away his cattle, his servants, his children, and his health, but left him his wife. S. Chrysostom assigns this as the reason : ‘He expected, by her counsel, to cause his overthrow, remembering his success by the same means in Paradise.’² S. Cyprian also : ‘Lest there should remain anything which Job should not experience in his temptations, the devil arms his wife against him, making use of that old craftiness of wickedness, as if he could deceive and beguile all men through the woman, as he had done at the beginning of the world.’³ It was through S. Peter, one of our Lord’s household, that the same tempter sought to persuade Him to forego and save Himself from that death which was to give life to the world (S. Matt.

¹ Isaac Williams, *The Baptistery*. ² Ep. i. ad. Cor. Hom. xxviii.

³ De bono patientiæ.

xvi. 22, 23); and so it is through our ties of family and friendship that he often seeks to compass our seduction and ruin.

We note in these three excuses a reference to the temptations suitable to the several stages of life. It has been already observed that these three temptations are addressed often *successively* to the same individual in youth, middle life, and old age. We sometimes may see the three excuses offered *simultaneously* by different members of the same family and household: the grandfather in his old age putting off the Gospel offers, because he has 'bought a piece of ground, and must needs go and see it;' the father, in middle life, because he has 'bought five yoke of oxen, and he goes to prove them;' and the son, just entering on manhood, saying, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' Thus covetousness, business, and pleasure are the chief deterrents from the service of Christ.¹ Observe the word 'therefore.' It is as if men, in excusing themselves from the service of God, indirectly accused God Himself of being the cause of their negligence. So it is when men argue that the strength of their passions is so violent and vehement

¹ 'Gerard gives well these three hindrances in three words—Dignitates, Opes, Voluptates' (Archbishop Trench). 'These are indeed the base anti-Trinity that the world worships—"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"' (Archbishop Leighton, i. 184). 'Set but a wedge of gold in sight, and Joshua (that could stay the course of the sun) cannot stay Achan from lusting and laying hold on it. Balaam's ass never gallops fast enough after preferment; and Zimri will have his Cozbi, though he die for it. These three enchantresses—Pleasure, Profit, and Preferment—whom have they not bewitched, befooled, be-beasted?' (Trapp.)

that they cannot be confined by the restraints of a moral and pure life. This is, in effect, to say unto God their Maker, 'Why hast Thou made me thus?'¹ (Rom. ix. 20). So again it is when men plead that their families keep them away from the ordinances of religion. It is the old excuse which Adam made in Paradise, 'The woman *whom Thou gavest to be with me*, gave me of the tree, and I did eat' (Gen. iii. 12)—as if, in giving us a wife and children, God had made it more difficult or impossible to serve Him; whereas every fresh tie that He gives us is a fresh claim on our thankfulness, and a fresh obligation to bless the Lord our God for all the benefits that He hath done unto us (Ps. ciii. 1, 2; cxvi. 11). If, as Solomon tells us, 'a prudent wife is from the Lord' (Prov. xix. 14); and if 'children and the fruit of the womb are an heritage and gift that cometh of the Lord' (Ps. cxxvii. 3); and if it is described as a mark of God's favour—'Thy wife shall be as the fruitful vine upon the walls of thine house, and thy children like the olive branches round about thy table. Lo, thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord' (cxxviii. 3, 4)—surely, if we so pervert and abuse these mercies as to make them an excuse for neglecting His call, we are doing for ourselves what God threatens to do as one of His sorest judgments—we are 'cursing our blessings' (Mal. ii. 2), and 'making the things that should have been for our wealth to be unto us an occasion of falling' (Ps. lxi. 23).

¹ Causas corruptelarum, non in illecebris, sed in cordibus habemus, et vitiositas nostra mens nostra est (Salvian. *de Gubern.* l. 6).

'*I cannot come.*'—He might more truly have said, 'I will not come.'¹ The will is wanting in all these three cases; and, as a matter of fact, the want of will is a want of power; for, as S. Basil says, 'the mind of man inclining to human enticements is weak towards the performance of divine things.'² And the will is wanting, because the love of God is not supreme in the heart. None of these three excuses could be made if the heart were not possessed by the love of the world; and the only thing which can prevent or extinguish the love of the world is the love of God. If a man looks intently on the sun, all earthly things become darkened to him. But a worldly lust will effectually eclipse the heavenly brightness:—

'One finger's breadth at hand will mar
A world of light in heaven afar;
A mote eclipse a glorious star,
An eyelid hide the sky.'³

It is strange how, in spite of the warnings, not only of revelation, but also of reason and common sense, these three vain excuses impose from age to age on the hearts of men. They are as current to-day as they were nineteen centuries ago, and roll from the tongues of men as glibly and as smoothly as if they had never been refuted, or had never been proved worthless and vain. The experience of the human heart always and everywhere is the same, that this world's delights and

¹ Nolle in causâ est, non posse pretenditur (Senec. *Ep.* 116).

² Dicit autem, secundum Basilium, 'non possum venire,' eo quod intellectus humanus vergens ad humanas illecebras, debilis est ad agendum divina (Ludolphus, *Vita Jesu Christi*).

³ Keble, *Lyra Innocentium*.

pursuits can never satisfy its infinite cravings; the husks of swine can never content the soul of a child of God; they only feed the famine and increase the hunger of the soul.¹ It is a proof of the nobility of our soul that no earthly acquisitions can satisfy it, while it is a proof of its degeneracy that it seeks satisfaction from them. And worldly things, even when not engrossingly pursued, are apt to defile the soul. S. Augustine, playing on the words, says, 'If the world (mundus) delight thee, thou wishest for ever to be unclean (immundus); but if now this "mundus" delight thee not, now art thou "mundus" (clean).'²

But how is it that the soul of man is become thus degenerate, and yet in his lowest degradation has longings which the world can never satisfy?³ His longings are relics and tokens of his immortal capacities; the evil is that he seeks to satisfy them with husks instead of bread. He insists on seeking to 'gather grapes of thorns, and figs of thistles' (S. Matt. vii. 16). These cravings belong to his higher nature,

¹ Sic fatui filii Adam, porcorum vorando siliquas, non esurientis animas, esuriem ipsam pascitis animarum. Sola nimirum hoc edulio inedia vestra nutritur, sola fames alitur cibo innaturali (S. Bernard, *de conversione*, cap. xiv.). Ista congerantur licet, nunquam explebunt inexplebilem animum (Senec. *Ep.* 65).

'That always hast, yet always art complaining,
And whin'st for more than earth has power to give;
Whose treasure flows and flees away as fast;
That ever hast and hast, yet hast not what thou hast.'

Quarles' *Emblems*.

² See Archer Butler's *Sermons*, vol. i. p. 278.

³ Vetas me cælo interesse, i.e. jubes me vivere capite demisso? Major sum, et ad majora genitus, quam ut mancipium sim mei corporis, quod equidem non aliter adspicio, quam vinculum aliquid libertati meæ circumdatum (Senec. *Ep.* 65).

and God, Who implanted them there, has provided suitable satisfaction for them. The first of these who made excuse for declining the invitation to the feast, because he had 'bought a piece of ground and must needs go and see it,' might have found a 'field' to 'buy' which he might well have 'sold all that he had,' the possession of which would have yielded him a treasure which he might lawfully and laudably have coveted, and the sight of which would have been the delight of his eyes for time and for eternity (S. Matt. xiii. 44). The second, who excused himself because he had 'bought five yoke of oxen, and must go to prove them,' might have found another 'plough' to which to 'put his hand,' from which he would have done well never to 'look back' (S. Luke ix. 62); and a 'yoke' to busy himself with which was 'easy' and honourable (S. Matt. xi. 29). And the third, who, because he had 'married a wife,' said that he 'could not come,' might have secured an espousal which would have entitled him to sit down 'at the marriage supper' of heavenly and eternal blessedness (1 Cor. xi. 2). And these they would have found identified with the 'great supper' which they declined. 'Be truly rich,' says S. Chrysostom. 'I would have thee to be so. Be covetous and rapacious: I blame thee not for it. Here it is a fault not to be covetous, but it is blameworthy not to be grasping. What, then, is this? "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." There be thou violent, be grasping.'¹ 'Let us drive out,' Stier says, 'by a true homœopathy,

¹ On 1 Tim. *Hom.* x.

all unholy ambition by a sacred aspiration to these things here promised by our Lord; for we cannot aim too highly for the Spirit's power and the glory of heaven.¹ 'There is a holy pride,' S. Jerome says, 'namely, to know ourselves to be superior to all earthly things, and to covet earnestly heavenly virtues.'² So our own poet says—

"Thou shalt not covet,' is a wise command,
But bounded to the wealth the sun surveys.
Look further, the command stands quite reversed,
And Avarice is a virtue most divine.'³

'It is the mark of a poor spirit to be satisfied with small things. Believe me, we have never received the principle of ambition for nothing. Let it work on its proper objects, and it is a noble element of our nature. Alas! we seem to covet every happiness but *religious* happiness; we spurn the idea of inferiority in any pursuit but that in which the prize is an immortal crown.'⁴ The desire for pleasure is to be satisfied by seeking it in heaven; for 'in God's presence is the fulness of joy, and at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore' (Ps. xvi. 11). Or, if we take the third excuse (as some have done)⁵ to represent mystically those who, having left the Church, have set

¹ *Words of Jesus*, vol. vii. p. 29.

² See Bishop Butler's *Serm.* i. upon the Love of God. *Discamus ex hac parte sanctam superbiam: sciamus nos esse meliores . . . sancta superbia est virtutes appetere* (S. Hier. *Ep.*).

³ Young's *Night Thoughts*, vii.

⁴ Archer Butler.

⁵ *Demum autem ultimum, qui se duxisse ait, se excusando, uxorem, putare typum carnalis hæretici, qui sponsâ illâ domini relictâ, quæ mater illi erat, impudentissime uxorem audet ducere quasi sit ipse Christus, qui novam velit ecclesiam fundare* (Zuccolius, *Hom. in Evang. S. Lucæ*).

up a Church of their own, they will find happiness in returning to their former loyalty, and will acknowledge that its Founder did not exaggerate or deceive when He called the Church on earth 'the kingdom of heaven.'

The transitoriness of all earthly enjoyments, and our short tenure of them, even at the longest,¹ might well teach us the vanity of excusing ourselves from accepting the heavenly invitation for the sake of pursuing such things as these, and might prompt us to use in a good sense the words of the epicure, 'Let us eat and drink ; for to-morrow we die' (Isa. xxii. 13 ; 1 Cor. xv. 32). Though we may, if we choose, answer the call of grace, when it says, 'Come,' by the refusal, 'I cannot come,' let us remember that we can give no such refusal to the call of Death or the summons of Judgment ; those calls we must obey, whether we will or not.² The apostle sums up the moral of this part of the parable in words which we shall do well to lay to heart : 'This I say, brethren : the time is short : it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none . . . and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy, as though they possessed not ; and they that use this world, as not abusing it : for the fashion of this world passeth away' (1 Cor. vii. 29-31).

¹ Linquenda tellus, et domus, et placens
Uxor, neque harum, quas colis, arborum
Te præter invisas cupressos
Ulla brevem dominum sequatur.

Hor. *Carm.*, lib. iii., Od. xiii. 21-24.

² Mors interim aderit cui, velis nolis, vacandum est (Senec. *de brevitate vite*, c. 8).

De morte hominis nulla est cunctatio longa (Juv. vi. 221).

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De morte hominis nulla est cunctatio longa (Juv. vi. 221).

CHAPTER VII

S. Luke xiv. 21.

*καὶ παραγενόμενος ὁ δοῦλος ἐκεῖνος ἀπήγγειλε τῷ κυρίῳ αὐτοῦ
ταῦτα.*

Et reversus servus nuntiavit hæc Domino suo.

So that (And the *R. V.*) servant came, and showed (told *R. V.*)
his lord these things.

WE have seen that 'the servant' here spoken of, who is one and the same throughout the parable, represents the order of preachers of the Gospel who are duly 'sent' by our Lord to convey the invitations of His grace to the souls of men, and who, though many in gifts, temperament, age, and race, yet are one in the truth of their doctrine and in the authority of their commission. We have also seen the minister of Christ busy in active service for his Lord, faithful in the discharge of his ministry, going forth to call, first of all, the elders of the Jews to the Gospel Feast, bidding them to 'come, for all things' were 'now ready,' but met everywhere with indifference and refusal. We now see him, in this verse, returning for a time from his labours, and reporting to his lord the result of his ministries. So Moses, after the murmuring and disaffection of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, reported the matter to the Lord (Num. xvi. 15). So Elijah 'made intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they

have killed Thy prophets, and digged down Thine altars, and I am left alone, and they seek my life' (1 Kings xix. 10). So Isaiah complains of the fruitlessness of his ministry, 'Lord, who hath believed our report?' (Isa. liii. 1.) So the apostles, after their first missionary journey, 'gathered themselves unto Jesus, and told Him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught' (S. Mark vi. 30). And later, when S. Peter and S. John were dismissed from the council, and had gone to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests had said unto them, with one consent they that heard it lifted up their voice to God, and said, 'And now, Lord, behold their threatenings' (Acts iv. 23-30). So the seventy 'returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy Name' (S. Luke x. 17). Thus 'the living creatures' whom Ezekiel saw in his vision so active and zealous in their ministries 'ran and returned' (Ezek. i. 14). So 'the man clothed with linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as Thou hast commanded me' (Ezek. ix. 11).

Many thoughts suggest themselves here: as, first—

1. The ministerial office has a variety of duties; and busy and devoted as a minister of Christ may be in active work for his Master, he must, from time to time, return from his public ministrations to private communion with Him;¹ as it is written, 'Unto the place

¹ Prædicatores exeunt ad prædicationem: revertentes ad Dei contemplationem, nuntiant quod egerunt per interiorem confessionem (Ludolph, *Vita Jesu Christi*, ii. p. 735).

from whence the rivers come, thither they return again' (Eccles. i. 7). The perfection of the Christian life is seen in the due regulation of action and contemplation.¹ Either pursued absorbedly and alone, besides presenting only half of the Christian character, will make the life and conversation exaggerated and distorted. The busy, bustling life so common, and indeed so necessary in these days, when the demands on a minister's time are, in large towns and cities at least, so unceasing, is apt to leave in abeyance the quieter, but no less necessary duties of retirement and devotion. But the more active and zealous a minister may be, the more time he needs, and must find or make, for quiet meditation, prayer, self-examination, study of the Scriptures, and close communion with Christ. And though, of course, there is opportunity for this daily in the public services of the Church, yet these public ministrations must not be supposed to compensate for or supersede the necessity of private devotions. Origen says, 'In the retirement of solitude the air is purer, heaven more open, God closer to us.'² And Contemplation and Action have a reciprocal influence one on the other; so Seneca says, 'Virtue consists partly in learning, partly in practice: we must both learn, and confirm by action what we have learned.'³ 'To be much on the mount with God,' says Archbishop Leighton, 'would make our

¹ Solemus dicere, summum bonum esse, secundum naturam vivere: natura nos ad utrumque genuit, et contemplationi rerum et actioni (Senec. *de otio sapientis*, c. 31).

² In solitudine aer purior, cœlum apertius, familiarior Deus.

³ Pars virtutis disciplinâ constat, pars exercitatione: et discas oportet, et quod didicisti agendo confirmes (*Ep.* 94).

faces shine when coming with His message to men.’¹ And the power and strength which such communion with God gives to the more active portion of the ministerial work is well described by Cardinal Newman (though he is speaking of Christians in general): ‘These are the meditations which come upon the Christian to console him while he is with Christ in the holy mount. And when he descends to his daily duties, they are still his inward strength, though he is not allowed to “tell the vision” to those around him. They make his countenance shine; make him tranquil, collected, serene, and firm in the midst of all temptations, persecutions, or bereavements.’ S. Augustine, showing how the study of wisdom is to be pursued by the due commingling of action and contemplation, reminds us that Socrates excelled more in the active, and Pythagoras in the contemplative exercise of it; whereas Plato perfected philosophy by joining the two together.² It is fatal to the growth of true religion in the soul, and therefore to any real and abiding influence on others, to become absorbed in active work, however useful and honourable, to the neglect of a minister’s own inward spiritual life. He must be often alone with God; and if he cannot secure the opportunity in any other way, he must rise early, if necessary ‘a great while before it is day’ (S. Mark i. 35), so that, his face

¹ *Works*, vol. ii. p. 136. ‘These ambassadors have need to be friends, and intimate friends, with their Lord. For if they are much with God in the mount, their returns to men will be with brightness in their face, and the law in their hand; their lives and their doctrines shall be heavenly’ (*Ibid.* p. 390).

² *De Civit. Dei*, lib. viii. cap. 4.

shining with the reflection of the Divine beauty, he may go forth to work and witness successfully in the world. 'Come ye yourselves apart, and rest a while,' is our Lord's considerate command to His hard-worked disciples (S. Mark vi. 31)—where we observe that He does not say 'Go,' but '*Come* and rest,' implying that He would be with them to comfort and refresh them; and that time of rest was not misspent nor idly spent, but was the preparation for future labour. So, at the present time, retreats, quiet days for prayer and meditation, and the like, are found to be invaluable, to those especially who have large and busy spheres of work allotted to them. And without such times of interior contemplation and devotional exercise, whether at home or with others, the busiest workers feel and lament the deterioration of their own inner life; as it is written, 'They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept' (Cant. i. 6)—a sad cry, indeed, but a too common experience.

It is quite possible, in days like these, to let our ministerial labours for others assume undue proportions, both to our own detriment and theirs. There is often a certain degree of fussiness and obtrusion of self—a feeling that nothing can go on well without our own personal supervision, a jealousy of interference, a sense of being indispensable to the welfare of each branch of work—in a word, a feeling of self-importance, that needs to be kept under restraint, or it may easily generate pride and self-seeking and desire for the applause of men. It, moreover, very unnecessarily increases the

amount of work to be done, and thereby encroaches both on our time and strength; it involves a man in many secular worries which are far better left to others—to devout lay members, who will exhibit a greater readiness and skill in such matters, and will show zeal equal to our own. 'To serve tables' takes up a great deal of time, which would be far better for ourselves, and more usefully for others, devoted to 'giving ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word' (Acts vi. 2-4). It withholds from the faithful laity an active share in Church work, which they would gladly take, and in doing which they would relieve the burden from the clergy, and would gain a deeper interest in the Church. Moreover, it dissipates the mind and makes it shallow; it leaves little time for reading and study, which are indispensable, and are required by our Ordination vow, and are also necessary for the preparation of sermons. Often a man who is scouring all over his parish in the week is ill prepared for the pulpit on Sunday; and it sometimes seems as if the souls of the well-to-do and educated were neglected, so exclusively are a parish priest's energies devoted to the amelioration of the temporal and spiritual condition of the poor. No wonder that the hard-worked man of business, the lawyer, the merchant, and others, grumble when the pulpit teaching is defective, and no pains even taken to instruct; when a few weak washy platitudes, followed by appeals for support of the different parochial charities, are thought sufficient to set before them on the one day of the week when they are able, and many of them eager to receive spiritual counsel, guidance,

and instruction.¹ The regulation of soup-kitchens, men's clubs and institutes; the attendance, evening after evening, at meetings of parish committees; the keeping of the accounts of schools, charities, and church offertories and collections;—these and the like are far better left to the philanthropic zeal of the religious laity, who would gladly relieve their parish priest of such more secular portions of his work, and would also, with their business habits, manage them far better than he can. Anyhow, the activities of the ministerial life must not be allowed to possess the mind and absorb the time to the exclusion of contemplation, prayer, study of the Scriptures (*for personal, not merely professional uses*), self-examination, and other devotional exercises. The hour which is spent in private communion with Christ will shed its fragrance and its blessing on all the hours of active work; but that hour curtailed or neglected will never be made up by any amount of bustling activities or public officiousness. Ludolph of Saxony makes a beautiful and suggestive comment on the calls of Andrew and Peter, and of James and John; the former of whom were called while *casting their nets into the sea*, the latter while *mending their nets*. Following S. Chrysostom, he shows that this indicates the difference in the character and work, especially of S. Peter and S. John. S. Peter laboured earnestly in preaching the Gospel, but wrote no Gospel (though it is generally supposed

¹ 'As I take it, there is a difference between the talk that becometh nurses amongst children, and that which men of capacity and judgment do or should receive instruction by' (Hooker, *Sermon Hab.* ii. 4).

that S. Mark wrote guided by his dictation or memoranda); but S. John both preached and wrote. The former is a type of the active, the latter of the contemplative life, or of the two combined; and he remarks that S. Peter was the most fervent preacher, but S. John the most excellent theologian.¹

But (2) the 'minister of Christ and steward of the mysteries of God' must, if he would be 'faithful,' render, from time to time, 'an account of his stewardship.' This he must needs do when 'the days of his ministration being accomplished' (S. Luke i. 23), he is 'no longer steward'; but he will, if prudent, forestall that awful day by frequent anticipations of it in communion with his Lord. 'That servant came and showed his lord these things.' And 'these things' were two:—

1. He was able to declare that he had faithfully delivered his lord's message, and given the invitation in his Name to those to whom he was sent. A faithful and wise steward will thus submit his day's work to his master's inspection; and if he does so, he will increasingly feel how comparatively little of his time has been devoted to his master, and how much of his master's work has been neglected. There are the lambs of Christ's flock, so precious to his Master (S. Matt. xviii. 14; S. John xxi. 15), and presenting so promising a field for his exertions; they are to be the parents of the next generation, and the future of

¹ Quæ vero circa Petrum actionem significant; quæ vero circa Johannem contemplationem. Petrus namque fervidissimus et magis sollicitus aliis, Johannes theologus excellentissimus (*Vita Jesu Christi*, i. pp. 286, 287).

the Church is, under God, largely in their hands. That Scripture lesson—was it prepared for, prayed over, earnestly and efficiently given, reverently handled, explained and applied, and made clearly the most important part of the children's education for that day? Those visits to the aged and infirm—was the church brought to those who could not get to church; the necessity laid before them of making an holy use of their enforced leisure, of preparation for the close of life, of reviewing with penitence and thankfulness the years that are past, of praying that they may 'depart in peace, their eyes having seen God's salvation'? (S. Luke ii. 28-30.) Those visits to the sick—were the details of their illness patiently listened to; the fact of Christ 'taking them aside from the multitude' to speak specially to their souls solemnly and prominently put before them? Those visits to the whole—were they redeemed from mere idle talk and gossip; some one thought, at least, left behind to linger when we were gone, if it was only the visible disapproval of and refusal to hear anything to the discredit of another? That social meeting—was it free from self-indulgence, frivolity, and waste of time, so that those who met us there would feel that what was spoken by us from the pulpit was reflected in the life? Those daily services—were they punctually begun and reverently conducted? Were they times of real prayer, confession, thanksgiving, and intercession for the quickening and intensifying of the spiritual life in ourselves and our parishioners, for the outpouring of the spirit of grace on our own parish and the

Church at large; for the conversion of the ungodly, the edification of the saints, the succour of the tempted, the comfort of the sorrowful, the soothing and sanctifying of the sick, the strength and refreshment of the dying? Those sermons that we preached—were they the counterparts of God's message, prepared for by prayer and study, delivered with authority and faith as God's message, not our own; and without fear or 'respect of persons,' 'whether men would hear or whether they would forbear'; without self-seeking or desire for the applause or praise of men? (Gal. i. 10; 1 Cor. iv. 3.) Were they loyally in unison with the teaching of the Church? Were the subjects chosen such as to keep up 'the proportion of the faith' (*τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως*, Rom. xii. 6) in our teaching, and such as were likely to be most useful to the known wants of our people? (S. Luke xii. 13-21; xiv. 7-14; Acts xxiv. 24, 25.) The Celebration of the Holy Communion—was It carefully prepared for, reverently received, thankfully kept in the heart's remembrance? Was It a real communion with Christ, and a feeding on Him? Was It so reverently administered, that the communicants would know and feel that we ourselves 'discerned the Lord's Body,' and were 'showing forth the Lord's Death'? (1 Cor. xi. 26, 29; Gal. iii. 1.) Such thoughts as these may well occupy our thoughts at the close of the day; it would be the return of the servant from his active ministration, and showing his lord these things.

2. But he must also set before his lord, so far as he knows it, the results of his mission. This can, of

course, only be done at longer intervals, such as the Ember seasons, or the anniversary of his appointment to that cure of souls, or on the eve of his removal to another part of the vineyard. And these results will be twofold:—

(a) The faithful discharge of our office will be sure to lead to some good results. God has promised, ‘My Word shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it’ (Isa. lv. 11). There will be some over whom he may rejoice, as having been bettered by his work.¹ Increasing numbers at church on Sundays, holy days, and week days; a larger body of communicants, and a more frequent and regular reception by some; a better and higher tone of public opinion in the place; some awakened, convinced, reformed; some strengthened, edified, perfected; children brought to Holy Baptism and Confirmation; some outside the Church brought back to the fold; some opposition silenced and turned to friendly help; marriage more honoured, and sin before marriage less frequent and more generally condemned by the society of the place where it was formerly condoned; more reverence in church; more readiness to take up different branches of church work; a deeper and stronger hold obtained on the confidence and affection of the people;—all these may be reported to the Master with humble, thankful acknowledgment of

¹ Non possum scire an ei profecturus sum quem admoneo: illud scio, alicui me profecturum, si multos admonuero: spargenda est manus: non potest fieri, ut non aliquando succedat multa tentanti (Senec. *Epist.* xxix.).

His help and blessing, as 'the apostles told Him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught' (S. Mark vi. 30), and how 'the devils were subject unto them through His Name' (S. Luke x. 17). 'At that time,' we are told, 'Jesus rejoiced in spirit' (verse 21); and He tells us that the triumph of the Gospel, even in a single soul, is such welcome tidings, that He will 'call together His friends and neighbours' to rejoice *with Him* over it (S. Luke xv. 3-10).

(b) But there will be other results. As 'some will believe the word that is spoken, some will believe not' (Acts xxviii. 24). To some, indeed, that word will be 'a savour of life unto life,' but to others 'a savour of death unto death' (2 Cor. ii. 16). There will be many not only, as this parable foretells, indifferent, uninfluenced, and unreformed; but, as the parable of the Marriage of the King's Son warns us, turned by our message into a more active opposition and a more violent hostility. And this is a thought not only for the clergy, but for all who work for God—for parents and sponsors, for Sunday-school teachers, district visitors, Scripture readers, temperance advocates, and the like. If they are more busy, the devil will be more busy too; if they sow the good seed, he will more industriously sow his tares; if they proclaim the truth, he will inculcate error; if the prophets of the Lord are more earnest and faithful, false prophets will be more numerous and zealous. This is the secret of much religious strife and discord which prevails in many a well-worked parish, of much of the dissent and persecution that abounds; it is the shadow made

darker by the brighter access of light; it is the resistance of the powers of darkness to the extension of the kingdom of Christ. And it is well to remember this, for often people will point to the dissensions which exist in a parish as a proof of a pastor's failure, when it is indeed a token of his success; and many a faithful parish priest will feel disheartened and despondent for the very things which ought to give him encouragement. Where there is no opposition and no dissent, there is often little definiteness of religious teaching, earnestness, or life.¹ 'Athens is quiet enough till Paul comes; and till Christ is born, Jerusalem is hushed in peace.'² Our Lord declares, 'I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?' (S. Luke xii. 49.)

But there are other cases which often cause sad perplexity and distress; there are some, perhaps, for whom we have laboured and prayed the most, on whom no impression for good seems to be made; the covetous, whom no representations made in public or private will make more liberal; the drunkard, who will not become sober; the dissolute, who will not become chaste; the fraudulent, who will not become honest; the malicious, who will not forgive; the respectable, whose religion is respectability, and who is offended at the idea that holiness is anything higher or better than which he possesses and prides himself on possessing; the indifferent, who meet the invitation,

¹ Sibique (concionatori) persuadeat, tunc suum munus non recte exercere, cum detractores et æmuli desunt (Stella, *Modus Concionandi*, cap. i.).

² Gurnall's *Christian in Complete Armour*.

'Come,' with the answer, 'I pray thee, have me excused,' or 'I cannot come.' The faithful minister of Christ will 'show Him' these things too; sometimes, alas, with loss of faith and patience; sometimes, perhaps, with murmuring, as Moses said, 'Lord, why is it that Thou hast sent me? For since I came to speak in Thy Name, Thou hast not delivered Thy people at all' (Exod. v. 22, 23); or as Isaiah, 'Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?' (Isa. liii. 1); sometimes with depression of spirit and despair of success, 'Then I said, I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nought and in vain'—still, perhaps, corrected by faith and consciousness of rectitude of will and energy of work, 'Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God' (xlix. 4); sometimes with tears of sorrow, 'O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people' (Jer. ix. 1); sometimes with fear, as the Psalmist, 'I am horribly afraid for the ungodly that forsake Thy law' (Ps. cxix. 53); sometimes with holy zeal, 'Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men have forgotten Thy law' (verse 136); sometimes with a fervent earnestness of desire, 'Awake, awake, O Arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, as in the generations of old' (Isa. li. 9); but *always* with much personal misgiving, feeling that much of our lack of success is attributable to our own lack of faithfulness and diligence, and of sufficiency for the high work to which we have been called.

And such a review of our work and its issues will surely be productive of good results. It will rebuke our indolence and indifference; it will deepen our penitence, stimulate our zeal, stir up our prayers, not only for ourselves and our people generally, but for individual souls. We shall carry into the closet and the sanctuary on our breastplate the names of our people (Exod. xxviii. 9-12), and plead for them personally and individually before God; and our prayers may give fruit and effect to our labours, and do more for our people than all our visits, admonitions, and sermons. Thus we shall wash and mend our nets after our daily toil, and be ready, if at any time our Lord should be pleased to call us to higher ventures and more successful efforts, saying, 'Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught' (S. Luke v. 2-4).

But all workers for Christ must bear in mind that they are called to work, not necessarily to success, much less to visible or immediate success.¹ Isaiah's

¹ Ita quæso fac quod tuum est; nam Deus quod Suum est satis absque tuâ solitudine et anxietate curabit. Planta, riga, fer curam, et tuas explicuisti partes. Sane incrementum, ubi voluerit dabit Deus, non tu (S. Bern. *de Consideratione*, lib. iv. cap. 1).

"Εκαστος τὸν ἴδιον μισθὸν λήψεται κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον κόπον· οὐ κατὰ τὸ τέλος, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸν κόπον (S. Chrys. in *Ep. 1 ad Cor.*, Hom. ix.).

'So do thy work; it shall succeed

In thine or in another's day;

And if denied the victor's meed,

Thou shalt not lack the toiler's pay.' (Whittier.)

'Therefore Christ calleth us fishers (S. Matt. iv. 19); for as a fisher taketh but a few in respect of those who go by, so we reform but a few in respect of those which go as they came' (H. Smith).

mission was a very awful one: 'Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed' (Isa. vi. 9, 10). There may be such among those to whom we are sent; but our mission is simply to declare our message. But there will be others who, to all appearance, still remain stubborn, hard, and impenetrable, in whom never in this world shall we 'see of the travail of our soul' (Isa. liii. 11);¹ nevertheless, we may remember that ours is but the sowing time, and 'the husbandman' must have 'long patience' before he receives 'the precious fruit of the earth' (S. James v. 7). The seed of precocious growth is doomed to premature failure (S. Matt. xiii. 5, 6); and often where the furrows show the least present sign, there will be in the future the richest harvest.² And though the harvest may not ripen till long after our day, we, too, shall

¹ 'How many there are who have heard ten times, and remained insensible, have afterwards at one hearing been converted; or rather, not at one hearing, for though they seemed insensible at the ten discourses, yet they gained something, and afterwards showed all at once abundant fruit. For as a tree may receive ten strokes and not fall, then afterwards be brought down all at once by a single blow, yet it is not done by that one blow, but by the ten which made that last susceptible' (S. Chrys. on 2 Tim., *Hom.* v.).

² 'Success often lies just beyond the last failure' (Andrew Carnegie, *Triumphant Democracy*, p. 135). 'Then nearest victory, when the last chance has seemed to fail' (F. W. Robertson, *Sermons*, vol. iv. p. 94).

rejoice in it; and even if we have gone to our grave 'weeping,' yet if we have sown 'the precious seed,' we shall 'doubtless come again with joy, bringing *our* sheaves with us' (Ps. cxxvi. 6); for in that day 'both he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together' (S. John iv. 36).

'So that servant came, and showed his lord these things.' We see the result of this interview in the words that immediately follow: 'The master of the house, being angry,' sent no more invitations to those who excused themselves from the feast, but sent his servant to summon others. So, doubtless, at the present time, sad consequences often follow from the communications of failure made by Christ's ministers. Such interviews may sometimes now shut the door and close the day of grace in the cases of some against whom it is too truly complained, 'All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people' (Rom. x. 21). Philip Henry says, 'There are four things I would not have for all the world against me: the Word of God, my own conscience, the prayers of the poor, and the account of godly ministers.'

CHAPTER VIII

S. Luke xiv. 21.

Τότε ὀργισθεὶς ὁ οἰκοδεσπότης εἶπε τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ, "Ἐξελθε ταχέως εἰς τὰς πλατείας καὶ ῥύμας τῆς πόλεως, καὶ τοὺς πτωχοὺς καὶ ἀναπήρους καὶ χωλοὺς καὶ τυφλοὺς εἰσάγαγε ὧδε.

Tunc iratus paterfamilias dixit servo suo, Exi in plateas et vicos civitatis, et pauperes et debiles et cæcos et claudos introduce huc.

Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

“**THEN.**”—The servant had returned and showed his lord the fruitlessness of his errand, disguising nothing, exaggerating nothing, extenuating nothing. ‘Then,’ finding his invitation rejected, ‘the master of the house’ was ‘angry.’ We dwell for a moment on this word, ‘Then.’ We have said that those seasons of intercourse between our Lord and His ministers, when they relate to Him (not because He is ignorant, but in testimony of their faithfulness and as a relief to their souls) what they have done and taught, and how and where they have been welcomed or rejected, and their invitation accepted or refused, are fraught with issues of the gravest interest both for themselves and for the souls committed to their charge. This was the crisis in the history of the first despisers of the Gospel invitation; this, we may suppose, is the crisis in many a soul now. A man, proud of his independence and contemptuous

of the poverty or meaner ability of 'the servant' who invites him, thinking it, perhaps, an act of impertinence that he should speak to him on such subjects except from the pulpit, ignorantly supposing that it is an act of 'sacerdotal' presumption by which he is attempting to gain dominion over him, dismisses his minister who has dared to deal faithfully with his soul, if not with a rebuke, at least with a clearly expressed hint that he need not address to him any more such pointed and personal exhortations (Amos vii. 11-13). Or the indifferent and careless hearer, having no appetite or relish for spiritual things, but having an heart bowed down to the world and its various fascinations, hears the invitation of grace; but it is to him a thrice-told tale, wearying him by its very familiarity, and so dismissed from his thoughts. Such as these may have more reason than they know of to dread those quiet times which 'the servant' who has invited them spends alone with 'the master of the house,' showing the lack of interest, the repeated refusals of one or another of those whom, in his Master's name, he has bidden to the feast; for it is written, '*Then the master of the house being angry,*' as if till this complaint reached his ears he was content to wait, though 'all things were now ready.'

'*The master of the house.*'—Whom are we to understand by this word (οἰκοδεσπότης)? He is evidently the same as he who sent 'the servant,' whom we have all along supposed to be our Lord Himself. In S. Matthew's Gospel (xxi. 23) the Father is represented as an Householder, and with special distinction from

His Son, Whom the husbandmen slew ; and the house of which He was Master was the Jewish Church, built up by Moses. But the same may be said of the Son also, for He is one with the Father, and the Father 'hath appointed Him Heir of all things' (Heb. i. 2), as it is written, 'This is the Heir' (S. Matt. xxi. 38). 'Moses was faithful in all his house, but this Man was counted worthy of more honour than Moses. Moses verily was faithful in all his house as a servant, but Christ as a Son over His own house.' So we may well understand Christ to be represented here as 'the Master of the house'—'Whose house are we' (Heb. iii. 2-6).

'Being angry.'—Though God, as a Spirit, is without passions, we often find anger and other passions attributed to Him in Scripture ; for if we are to know God, His character and attributes must be set before us in language that we can understand. And hence we find anger,¹ fury, grief, repentance, and the like ascribed to God ; for Scripture speaks to us 'after the manner of men, because of the infirmity of our flesh' (Rom. vi. 19). 'Before a great vessel that is full can pour water from itself into a little empty pot that stands under it, it must stoop and decline itself. Thus He descends to our capacities ; and that man may know Him in some measure, He will be known as man. Sometimes by bodily members—eyes, ears, hands, feet ; sometimes by spiritual affections—anger, sorrow, jealousy, repentance ; by which He signifies, not what He is indeed, but such as is needful for us to

¹ *Ira non affectus, sed effectus, quia punit ut iratus* (Ludolphus, *Vita Jesu Christi*).

know of Him.¹ 'That God cannot be in a passion is certain; neither doth Scripture assert or suppose that He may. But when God condescends to talk with men, He is pleased to make use of human words and human passions, to be understood by men, and so render His expressions more pathetic, lively, and affecting. Nevertheless, whatever is thus spoken ἀνθρώποπαθῶς, after the manner of men, must be understood θεοπρεπῶς, in a sense suitable to the Divine majesty as made known to us by reason, and much more by revelation.'² Archbishop Trench says, 'In God the pure hatred of sin, which is, indeed, His love of holiness at its negative side, finds place;³ and this very fact that God is so patient and longsuffering makes it all the more sure that if His patience be outwearied and provoked beyond measure, His anger will

¹ T. Adams, *Sermons*, vol. i. p. 342.

² Waterland, iv. pp. 239, 240. Deus non irascitur, nec pœnitet eum more hominum, quia in Deum nullo modo cadere possunt hæ passionēs; sed Scriptura sacra (ut Origenes adnotat) more humano loquitur, quia hominibus loquitur, sicut homo senex quando loquitur cum infantulo parvo, puerilia et ut parvulus loquitur (Stella, *Enarr.* in cap. xiv. Evang. Lucæ).

³ *Parables*, p. 154. 'Thus the Divine anger in its deepest ground is love. Love becomes consuming fire to everything which is opposed to it, to the very nature of the good. Love would not be in earnest with itself if it did not negative its negative' (Müller, *Christian Doctrine of Sin*). 'Is not anger a passion of human infirmity? and will I make God subject to passions of infirmity? Is not anger a defect in reason? Is not God a perfection above reason, and can there be defect in perfection? Can there be passion in Him that is "purus actus"? But is it not that anger is not a passion, but an action? not a defect, but an effect? for then is God said to be angry, when He puts His judgments in execution; when His rebukings tend not to conversion, but to confusion; when His mercy attempts not the rigour of His justice' (Sir R. Baker's *Meditations on Psalm vi.*).

be in proportion to His former endurance,¹ as 'the bow that is hardest to bend sends out an arrow with most force.'² And because 'God is love' (1 S. John iv. 8), and 'the Lord our God is holy' (Ps. xcix. 9), we are sure that His anger must be fierce and inexorable; for not only is it true, as H. Melvill says, that 'Divine mercy scorned is the fiercest of vengeance'; but, as Bishop Butler argues, 'Goodness is the natural and just object of the greatest fear to an ill man. Malice may be appeased or satiated; humour may change; but goodness is a fixed, steady, immutable principle of action. If either of the former holds the sword of justice, there is plainly ground for the greatest of crimes to hope for impunity; but if it be goodness, there can be no possible hope, while the reason of things or the ends of government seek for punishment. Thus every one sees how much greater chance of impunity an ill man has in a partial administration than in a just and upright one.'³

But as here the Master of the house is 'the Man Christ Jesus,' anger, which is an human affection, and with us seldom free from sin either in its object or in its degree, was a perfectly natural feeling in Him Who was Perfect Man, and Who, because He was sinless, could only feel it towards objects that were evil, and

¹ 'What wilt thou pretend in that terrible day? Though all other kinds of people should offer some excuse, thou who hast heard the Gospel shalt be speechless. For not only shall the rigour of justice condemn thee, but mercy itself shall plead against thee, for thou hast despised it' (Archbishop Leighton, *Works*, vol. ii. p. 193). Qui gratiam experti sunt, iram maxime vereri debent (Bengel).

² Feltham, *Resolves*.

³ Preface to *Sermons*.

could never, in the expression of it, exceed the measures of right and moderation.¹ So it is said of Him on one occasion, during 'the days of His Flesh,' that 'He looked round about with anger' on those who in 'the hardness of their hearts' would have forbidden Him to work a miracle of mercy on the Sabbath (S. Mark iii. 5); and that 'He was much displeased' when 'His disciples rebuked' those who brought little children to Him (x. 13, 14). And patient and forbearing as our Lord was and ever is in His dealings with sinners, yet the rejection of His love and mercy was likely to fill Him with indignation. As He 'rejoiced in spirit in that hour' when His disciples brought back the tidings of the triumphs of His grace (and it is the only time that we read of our Lord rejoicing or being other than 'a Man of sorrows'), so we might expect that when His servants return with the tidings that His offers of grace are refused and His overtures of mercy despised, He would be both sorrowful and angry. When He tells the disciples that the promised 'Comforter shall reprove the world of sin,' He does not specify the enormities of sin which we commonly consent to condemn as gross and heinous; but He says — 'of sin, because they believe not on Me' (S. John

¹ 'The economy of God's attributes is such that from some of them we may appeal to others; but there are some of them again from which there lies no appeal. As when the Divine power and justice threaten us, there is yet a refuge in His mercy; but he that is bankrupt upon the score of mercy has no other relief to rest upon. He has sinned against his last remedy; he has poisoned himself with a cordial; he has stumbled at that Stone upon which he should have built. When Compassion condemns us, who shall be our Advocate?' (South, *Sermons*, vol. iv. p. 432.)

xvi. 8, 9). That is the most fatal of all sins, for it is the rejection of the remedy for sin. We, perhaps, feel it difficult to associate the idea of anger with the meek and gentle Lamb of God; but in the Book of the Revelation we read of His wrath, and that not as of ‘the Lion of the tribe of Judah’ (v. 5), but as ‘the wrath of the Lamb’ (vi. 16)—an expression fraught with awful thoughts of utter despair; for if ‘the Lamb of God’ be no longer patient with the sinner, if the very love of God be armed against him, if the ‘Door’ of salvation be closed against him, how irremediable must be his doom! Well may those on whom His anger rests ‘cry unto the mountains and rocks, Fall upon us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of *the Lamb*; for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?’ (vi. 16, 17.) Well will it be for us all if, before He ‘swears in His wrath that we shall not enter into His rest’ (Ps. xcv. 11), we ‘kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and so we perish from the right way; if His wrath be kindled, yea, but a little, blessed are all they that put their trust in Him’ (ii. 12).¹

But if the anger of the master of the house is thus terrible, yet it shows us in the same proportion the earnestness and reality of His call to us, and the unspeakable yearnings of His mercy and love towards our souls. ‘If I were to give one an invitation out of mere civility to dine with me, while I was not in earnest, I should not be angry if he refused. And, O

¹ Non est quo fugias a Deo irato nisi ad Deum placatum (S. Aug. in Ps. vii.).

man, if God merely spoke a word of courtesy, if it did not proceed from the deepest depths of His heart when He calls thee to blessedness, He would certainly not be so angry with thee for despising His supper.¹

'Said to his servant.'—Though the master of the house was angry, it was not with the servant, though he had brought back the tidings of the utter failure of his mission. Our Lord is very tender and considerate with His servants. They often mourn over their own insufficiency and the apathy of their people; but if they declare faithfully and earnestly His message, He will call them 'good and faithful servants,' though they may not have been so successful as others; they may have been unable to win over to Christ those to whom they were sent, but they have at least 'delivered their souls' (Ezek. iii. 19). On the other hand, in their successes they have also His help, approval, and sympathy; for surely it is of those who labour for Christ, and 'travail in birth till Christ is formed in them' (Gal. iv. 19), that it is said that the Good Shepherd shall 'gently lead those that are with young' (Isa. xl. 11). No, there is no anger here against the servant, nor is there any trace of silent displeasure. All throughout there is a happy interchange of confidence between the master and the servant; 'the servant came and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house said to the servant.' Prayer is answered, not only with an answer of peace, but with a further commission in His service.

'Said to his servant.' Many masters would have sent

¹ G. K. Rieger, quoted by Denton.

forth another servant, thinking there must be something amiss in the manner or the tone of giving the invitation that would account for the universal rudeness and discourtesy of the invited guests; just as now there seems to be a disposition in many to think that, as the masses are indifferent to the Gospel message, it is time to seek some other agencies more powerful and attractive to reclaim them. 'If the clergy of the Church have failed to gain an audience for their message, try some other messengers; what matters the commission if extraneous and irregular teachers are more efficient, and likely to be more successful? Perhaps such guests as are invited would understand better and respond more eagerly to those who are of the same social status as themselves; and there are, doubtless, many members of sectarian bodies, outside the Church, more eloquent, more attractive, and apparently more successful; let these be sent, or without waiting to be sent, let them 'go and bring in the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind, whom the Church seems unable to reach or persuade.' But the master of the house in this parable does not alter his agency, though he employs his servant differently. Those formerly invited have refused; let others, therefore, be invited; but the same servant who was unsuccessful before must undertake this second mission. The terms of the parable clearly imply that, to the end, the person sent shall be the same, and that none shall presume to give the master's invitation but his own (*αὐτοῦ*) servant whom he has sent.

'Go out.'—The duties of 'the servant' are various;

there is a constant going and coming in this parable; and the servant seems perfectly content in doing his lord's will, however difficult or mysterious it may be. So the minister of Christ, though he has his times of quiet communion with his Master, is not to spend his time only in contemplation and retirement, however precious to his own soul or however indispensable to a right discharge of his mission to the souls of others; he must 'go out' to active work.¹ 'Retired contemplation may be more pleasing, but due activity for God and His Church is more profitable; Rachel was fair, but she was barren; Leah blear-eyed, but fruitful.'² Bede remarks that throughout the Book of Canticles 'the Bride always expresses a desire to be with her spouse, in the house, on the bed, or in any inner place; whereas the Bridegroom is always summoning His love to outer tasks, to the labours of the vineyards or of the gardens; and that because Holy Church, if it might be, would ever gladly converse with her Lord in the quiet of earthly peace, and bring forth and train up for Him a spiritual progeny. But He orders her to be tried by constant sufferings in the present life that she may arrive, all the purer, at everlasting blessings, and lest, if all temporal things should be too prosperous, she might take pleasure in her exile and sigh less after the heavenly country.'³ 'He is no perfect preacher,' says S. Gregory, 'who either from devotion or contemplation

¹ *Exi cito, sc. ab otio studii et contemplationis, ad publicum actionis et prædicationis* (Ludophus, *Vita Jesu Christi*, vol. ii. p. 736).

² Archbishop Leighton on 1 S. Peter iv. 10.

³ Quoted in Littledale on *Canticles*, p. 53.

neglects work that ought to be done, or from urgency in business puts aside the duties of contemplation. . . . It is hence that the Redeemer of mankind in the day-time exhibits His miracles in cities, and spends the night in devotion and prayer upon the mountains; namely, that He may teach all perfect preachers that they should neither entirely leave the active life from love of the speculative, nor wholly slight the joys of contemplation from excess in working, but in quiet imbibe by contemplation what in employment they may pour back to their neighbours by word of mouth. For by contemplation they rise into the love of God, but by preaching they return back to the service of their neighbour.' So Stella: 'Though the contemplative is more perfect than the active life, nevertheless these are both sisters, as Martha and Mary, who loved each other with exceeding charity and love; neither does the one contradict the other; nay, by mutual offices they help each other as sisters.'¹ And in a life of active obedience the minister of Christ is serving and worshipping his Lord no less really and acceptably than in the closet or the sanctuary; he is doing God's will on earth, as the angels do it in heaven; as it is said of the angels of little children, that while they guard their precious charge, they 'do always behold the face of God' (S. Matt. xviii. 10). 'Priests are *angeli domini*, and the angelic life is twofold—Godward and manward; the angels are "worshipping spirits sent forth to minister" (Heb. i. 14, *λειτουργικὰ πνεύματα*)' (Randolph, *Threshold of the Sanctuary*, p. 75).

¹ *Enarr.* in cap. x. Evang. Lucæ.

‘*Quickly.*’—Some, as Goebel,¹ think that this word is to be taken in connection with the words preceding, ‘being angry he said,’ as implying that the haste to which the servant is urged is caused not so much by the hospitable thought of the master, and the remembrance that the supper was now ready—‘for then the *ταχέως* must rightly have stood in the case of the second *ἐξέλθε*, verse 22, where it is wanting’—but by the wrath excited in his mind against those who refused to come, which prompted him to take speedy measures for their punishment. And as Isaac Williams observes, the Jewish rulers having rejected the call, the publicans and sinners were brought in, and that ‘quickly’; for the call of these was almost instantaneous after the refusal of those. And the missionary history of the Church teaches us that among the Jews the work of grace was limited to time, whereas the call of the Gentiles extends over centuries. Others regard this word ‘quickly’ as showing the earnestness and ardour with which God longs for the happiness and salvation of men, and which must be reflected and expressed in the zeal of His ministers in ‘exhorting them to-day, while it is called To-day’ (Heb. iii. 13), and in ‘seeking by all means to save’ them that are lost (1 Cor. ix. 22). When He called Zaccheus, He bade him ‘make haste to come down’ (S. Luke. xix. 5), as if His love could brook no delay, but must be satisfied in the salvation of that son of Abraham.

This latter thought is expressed in the questions asked by the Bishop at the ordination of Priests: ‘Will

¹ *Parables of Jesus*, p. 175.

you give *your faithful diligence* always so to minister the Doctrine and Sacraments and Discipline of the Church, as the Lord hath commanded?' 'Will you be ready with *all faithful diligence* to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's Word, and to use both public and private monitions and exhortations as well to the sick as to the whole within your cures, as need shall require, and means be given?' 'Will you be *diligent* in Prayers and reading of the Holy Scriptures?' 'Will you be *diligent* to frame and fashion your own selves and your families, according to the doctrine of Christ?' And in the exhortation by the Bishop it is said: 'If it shall happen the same Church or any member thereof take hurt or hindrance by your *negligence*, ye know the greatness of the fault, and the horrible punishment which will ensue. Wherefore consider with yourselves the end of your ministry towards the children of God, towards the Spouse of Christ, and *see that you never cease your labour, your care and diligence*, until you have done all that lieth in you, *according to your bounden duty*, to bring all such as are or shall be committed to your charge unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfection of age in Christ, that there be no place left among you either for error in religion or for viciousness in life.'

'*Into the streets and lanes of the city.*'¹—The 'streets' are the broad avenues, the 'lanes' the narrow

¹ *πλατεῖα* and *ρύμη* stand together, as in the text, in Isa. xv. 3 (Olshausen).

alleys.¹ There are always in the streets and lanes of a city many who will be only too thankful to avail themselves of the bounties of the rich and liberal. ²Ludolph of Saxony understands by these the Jews, who, like streets and lanes of a city, were enclosed by legal observances; of whom some were in the broad way of prosperity and pleasure; others in the narrow way of adversity and tribulation.² S. Ambrose says, 'God sent to sinners, that from the broad way that leadeth to destruction they might come to the narrow way that leadeth unto life.'³ Another says, 'The broad streets represent the ways of open wickedness, and the lanes of the city the haunts of those of evil conversation.'⁴

'*Of the city.*'—The message of the Gospel was still confined to the Jewish people. The rulers had indeed rejected it, but now it was offered to the reception of the outcast and abandoned. It might seem little likely to attract the regard of such. In Jer. v. 1 we read how the prophet was sent by God to say, 'Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth'; but when they found none, the prophet says, 'Then said I, Surely these are poor; they are

¹ *πλάτειας*, latiores; *ρύμας*, angustiores vias (Rosenmüller, quoted by Wordsworth).

² *Vita Jesu Christi*, vol. ii. p. 732.

³ Mittit ad plateas, quia misit ad peccatores, ut de latioribus viis ad angustam venirent, quæ ducit ad vitam (*Expos. Evang. sec. Lucam*, lib. vii.).

⁴ Plateæ sunt late patentes iniquitatis viæ; vici civitatis, contubernia inhonestæ conversationis (Hugonis de S. Victor. opp., Part II. cap. xviii. *Exegetica dubia*).

foolish: they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God. I will get me unto the great men and speak unto them.' He felt it likelier that he might find goodness in the leaders in Church and State. It might seem, therefore, that the Gospel message would be more likely to attract and win those to whom it was sent—the Pharisees, who had such a reputation for sanctity, and the Scribes, whose office it was to study and expound the Law of God—and that, on their refusal, it would be idle to offer it to the 'poor and foolish.' But it is not only offered, but accepted. A hint is given us here against a tendency of our nature to look far away for the objects of our bounty and charity, while we neglect the poor and perishing at our own door. 'It is indeed among the most singular of the tendencies of modern benevolence to feel for the distant and forget the near; to sympathise with the destitution of the Hindu and neglect the immortal spirit that is hurrying to ruin in its pathway.'¹ Before the Gospel was offered to the Gentiles, the Jews should have the refusal of it; and even though the rulers of the city rejected it, the very outcasts of the city shall have it before aliens. See how they are here described.

'And bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.'—We pause on the expression 'bring in,' as conveying a different idea from the 'say, come,' of verse 17, or the 'compel them to come in' of verse 23. Those who are now called are helpless, and therefore cannot, and they are poor and ill-clad, and therefore

¹ Archer Butler.

may not like to, come of themselves; ‘*bring*’ them in, therefore, just as they are, and assure them of My welcome. These words remind us, as surely our Lord meant them to remind His hearers, of the words He had just before spoken, ‘When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame,¹ the blind’ (verse 13). He would thus show that there was the most perfect harmony between His words and actions, His teaching and example; that He was not like the Pharisees, ‘who said and did not’ (S. Matt. xxiii. 3), but that His preaching and His practice exactly tallied the one with the other, as it is written, ‘All that Jesus began both to do and teach’ (Acts i. 1).

‘*The poor:*’ These represent those who know their own poverty, and are ‘poor in spirit’ (S. Matt. v. 3), and ‘meek and lowly of heart’ (xi. 29); who are and feel that they are destitute of spiritual riches, poor of all that makes a man truly rich. Such as these, having nothing to trust to in themselves, need no compulsion. Temporal poverty, too, prevents many from being ensnared by the love of worldly possessions; ‘they are free from many of the hindrances which keep back those who are ensnared in the pursuit of worldly riches; at the same time, being children of the *City* of God, they are not without all knowledge of Him, and are easily brought into the true fold, and partake of the Supper prepared for them.’² Bellarmine says, ‘Because the rich were so absorbed in their lands,

¹ The word here rendered in our Authorised Version ‘lame’ is the same (χωλούς) as is rendered ‘halt’ in the parable. The Revised Version renders it ‘lame’ in both places.

² Denton, *On the Gospels*.

oxen, and wives, that they cared not for His entertainment, He calls the poor that had not money wherewith to buy lands or oxen, nor the means of marrying, when they were not able to maintain their wives.' Zuccolius explains the word as meaning 'the poor in spirit,' who, if riches increase, set not their hearts upon them, or if they want riches, do not care for them (*si eis carent, non easdem curant*), who are thus opposed to the man who 'bought a piece of ground, and must needs go and see it.'¹ 'Scripture teaches us, in the glorious words of Charles Wesley's hymn, to be "strong in self-despair," and not in self-confidence; that emptiness is indeed the one condition of fulness; that however sad a thing it may be in this world to be a bankrupt, in the spiritual world it is the best thing which can happen to begin with being such; a man's poverty being there his riches, his weakness his strength, and his ignorance his wisdom; for such are the strange paradoxes of the kingdom of heaven.'²

'*The maimed*' are those who through weakness or injury have had their faculties crippled; and will here mean those who, through their own folly, or through the stumblingblocks raised by others, or through the subtle disease of sin, have lost the integrity and strength that they once enjoyed, and are thereby hindered from advancing in the ways of truth and righteousness. Thus Plato speaks of 'a soul crippled as regards the truth.'³ How many there are who 'did

¹ *Hom.* in *Evang. S. Lucæ.*

² Archbishop Trench, *On the Parables.*

³ *ψυχή ἀνάπηρος πρὸς ἀλήθειαν* (*Rep.* 535 D.).

run well' (Gal. v. 7), but whose spiritual energies have been sapped and weakened by some indulged evil habit, so that they no longer 'run the race that is set before them' (Heb. xii. 1)! How many who once were workers for God, and had influence for good over the souls of others, have 'stumbled' over some 'rock of offence,' and lost their faith in the doctrines of the Bible and of the Church, and stand 'maimed' and idle in 'the streets and lanes of the city,' partakers in the wretchedness which they once did so much to alleviate!

'*The halt*,' or lame, are those who from some cause or other walk uncertainly, painfully, and slowly, and with halting pace along the way of life. They may include, perhaps, those who, otherwise excellent, are the victims of strong and erroneous prejudices, contracted partly by early education, partly by pride and obstinacy and self-opinionated partiality; or the inconsistent, whose head and heart are not together, whose views of the truth are clear and orthodox, but whose practice is not on a level with their knowledge. Zuccolius suggests it to mean one who confesses that he cannot walk, and, a good habit having been obtained, seems even to himself unable to walk, to wit, along the ways of the lust of the flesh.¹ It may also represent those who too exclusively devote themselves to what they deem 'spiritual religion;' who forget that, as in our nature we are compounded of soul and body, so

¹ Qui se fatetur ambulare non posse, et bono habitu parito, etiam sibi videtur non posse, scilicet, concupiscentiæ carnis (*Hom. in Evang. S. Lucæ*).

we are bound to ‘glorify God in our body and in our spirit’ (1 Cor. vi. 20). It is said of Zacharias and Elisabeth that ‘they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless’ (S. Luke i. 6); but there are many who are very desirous to obey ‘the commandments,’ but disparage and neglect ‘the ordinances of the Lord.’ The obedience of such is halting, and their walk is lame. Through the neglect of Church ordinances they not only disobey His commandments—for He has prescribed them for our use—but they fail to receive the strength which, through them, the Holy Spirit is wont to impart; and hence they cannot make the progress which they might and ought to make in the ways of holiness. Many, too, there are who are most regular at the ‘ordinances,’ but are not careful about the commandments of the Lord; whose religion is one of church-going merely, who will not miss a service at church, but are not at all scrupulous about missing many a service that they might do at home or elsewhere. Both to their own souls and to those about them who are pained by or who gloat over their inconsistencies, much harm is done. The word may also be applied to those who ‘halt¹ between two opinions’ (1 Kings xviii. 21), who are undecided between Christ and the world, and yet see the impossibility of ‘serving God and mammon’ (S. Matt. vi. 24). The urgent call of ‘the servant’ may quicken their decision for Christ, and bring them to His Feast, where they find ‘satisfaction for their immortal cravings and rest for their souls.’

¹ The Hebrew word here used, *posakh*, means literally to limp.

‘And *the blind.*’ The loss or lack of sight is counted one of the saddest privations of the natural life; it is, of course, still more so in the spiritual life. Besides the denial of the pleasure and happiness of beholding the sun (Eccles. ii. 7), and the beauties of Creation, and the faces of those they love, there is a dependence on others and danger of stumbling and falling. It was a special part of our Lord’s mission ‘to open the blind eyes’ (Isa. xlii. 7); but none are likely to apply for His healing power who ‘know not that they are blind’ (Rev. iii. 17). And there are many such. It is sometimes brought as an argument against the truth of certain doctrines, sometimes of even the cardinal truths of our holy religion, that so many men of giant intellect fail to see either their truth or their reasonableness. And it is sad to hear, as we may hear any day, men, and women too, airing their ideas about religious matters, and often decrying and denying ‘the things most surely believed among us,’ as if they were perfectly competent to discuss them, and without any notion that ‘the eyes of their understanding’ need to be ‘enlightened that they may know’ such things (Eph. i. 18), and that they can be blind in these matters, while they see so clearly on others. But the fact is that many of these are blind, ‘having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart’ (Eph. iv. 18). They have not the spiritual faculties necessary for the discernment of spiritual truths—for ‘the natural man’ (*ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος*) ‘receiveth not the things of the Spirit of

God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually' (*πνευματικῶς*) 'discerned' (1 Cor. ii. 14). Just as a person may have the keenest faculty for hearing, and yet, as we say, 'have no ear for music,' or may have excellent sight and yet be 'colour-blind,' so many of the most far-seeing intellects have no sight for spiritual truths. Hence they are incompetent to form an opinion on catholic truth as expressed in the Creeds of the Church. Their reason may be usefully employed in many of the departments of Biblical criticism, for there are questions which must be settled, if they are to be settled at all, by the application of the laws of criticism by which other books are tested; but the delicate question of inspiration, or the definitions of doctrine, or the mystical exposition of Scripture, these are matters which must be 'spiritually discerned,' and can only be discerned by such as are 'spiritual' (1 Cor. ii. 15). 'The blind' also signify those whose sight has been first dulled and dimmed, and at last totally obscured by worldly and fleshly lusts, 'whom the god of this world hath blinded, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, Who is the Image of God, should shine unto them' (2 Cor. iv. 4); who are destitute of the virtues and graces of the Christian life, of whom S. Peter says, 'He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off' (2 S. Pet. i. 9); those also who, through ignorance or invincible prejudice, are disqualified from seeing things as they really are. Of these latter the blindness, though pitiable, is perhaps pardonable, as our Lord says, 'If ye were blind, ye should

not have sin' (S. John ix. 41); and for such He pleads, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (S. Luke xxiii. 34). But whatever is the cause or the degree of the blindness of the soul, He at Whose coming it was promised, 'Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened' (Isa. xxxv. 5), invites them to His Gospel Supper, and says, 'Come and see' (S. John i. 39).

'The poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind' were, so far as the opinion of the world went, or their own either, the last to whom it seemed likely that such an invitation would be sent. As the Scribes and Pharisees 'trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others' (S. Luke xviii. 9), so the publicans and sinners, accustomed to be so despised and regarded with suspicion and branded as infamous, too often amply justified the opinion in which they were held. 'To think and believe ill of our brethren is the very way to make them what we believe them to be; to think and believe well of them encourages them and makes them better. Your despair of them drives them also to despondence; your hope of them fills them with hope. The one dismays them, almost as if they saw the spectre of their sins stalking abroad in the sight of the world; the other is like the angel of their better nature, cheering them and beckoning them forward.'¹ But no charitable hopes were entertained of these outcasts; and even now, it seems to many as unreasonable for the abandoned and sinful to be invited to the Gospel

¹ Hare's *Victory of Faith*, p. 87.

Feast as for the destitute and afflicted to be invited to a rich man's 'great supper.' The Gospel of Christ, however, was specially to be 'preached to the poor' (S. Luke iv. 18; S. Matt. xi. 5), and it gives far more hope and comfort to the sinner than the Law could give. The Law could show clearly enough the discrepancy between the life of the sinner and its own requirements, but could show no hope of reconciliation, nor bridge over the awful chasm between God and the sinner (Isa. lix. 2). It could show our need, but not satisfy it; and disclose our wound, but not heal it. Thus 'the Law was a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ' (Gal. iii. 24), Who 'came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' (S. Matt. ix. 13). It was 'to seek and to save that which was lost' that the Good Shepherd came on His errand of mercy (S. Luke xix. 10); and while 'the priest and the Levite' only 'looked on' the wounded traveller, whom 'the thieves had left half dead,' and 'passed by on the other side,' unable or unwilling to revive or relieve him, the good Samaritan 'had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him' (S. Luke x. 30-34).

O the riches of the mercy and compassion of Christ! How need any one scruple to believe that the Gospel is meant for him, be he the worst and most sinful, the most abandoned and depraved, the most ruined and lost? 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' (1 Tim. i. 15): if, then, we are the chief of

sinner, we have, as the greater need, so the greater claim on His salvation. Such the servant of Christ is bidden to bring in—not to feed them, not to clothe them before they come, but to ‘bring them in’ just as they are; not to wait till they come, for they are poor, and will feel ashamed; they are maimed and lame, and must be helped to come; they are blind, and one must guide them to Christ. Here, surely, is a hint at the necessity and value of pastoral visitation. Our Lord did not wait for patients to come to Him, but ‘went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease, among the people’ (S. Matt. iv. 23).¹ We read indeed that ‘they ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, *where they heard He was*’ (S. Mark vi. 55); but He was there because He knew that *there they were* who needed His help. As, on one occasion, He knew that a Samaritan woman and her friends and neighbours needed His teaching, and He ‘must needs’ (ἐἴδει) ‘go through Samaria’ to impart to them the knowledge of Himself and of His truth (S. John iv. 4); and on another occasion, when a poor Syrophenician woman was in trouble about her daughter, He went ‘to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon,’ the very borders of the Gentile world, to minister to her need (S. Mark vii. 24).

Some say that it is enough if services are provided

¹ Et circuibat Jesus totam Galilæam. Quia enim illi, ut debiles, ad medicum venire non potuerunt, Ipse, sicut studiosus medicus, circuibat graviter ægrotantes (Ludolphus, *Vita Jesu Christi*).

at the Church, and the bells give the summons inviting people to come. But no, 'Go out quickly, and bring them in.' Some think that the masses are hopelessly alienated from the Church; many of them also are leading most abandoned lives; it is no use to try to bring such to the means of grace. The answer is, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.' And in the parable we find that they willingly came. As a matter of experience, in 'the crowded lanes of our cities, whose physical is not so polluted as their moral atmosphere,'¹ there is often more hope of these outcasts than there is of the decent and respectable who seem ready to accept the Gospel call. The self-righteous see in the Gospel little that they care for; it provides food, but we must be hungry; it promises righteousness, but we must be conscious of our own unrighteousness; it offers healing, but we must feel our sickness; it preaches forgiveness, but we must know ourselves to be sinners. The sinful and despised, when the Gospel is preached, feel that it is just what they need; and they are not slow to recognise and accept the love and grace of Him Who calls them. And so 'He filleth the hungry with good things,' but 'the rich' are 'sent empty away' (S. Luke i. 53). In the slums of our great towns we shall, perhaps, not find many who will enter the Church's door: why do we not take the Church into those slums? Why do we not preach more, as Christ and His apostles did, in the open air? and show ourselves as earnest to offer

¹ M'Cosh.

the rich treasures of the Gospel as the hawkers are to sell their wares? When the emissaries of infidelity are gathering round them audiences at the street corners or in the open spaces; and when the panderers to impurity are selling obscene literature or singing filthy songs, why do we not show ourselves at least as earnest in our desires that God's Name may be hallowed and His kingdom come, as the devil's agents are that His Name may be blasphemed, and that pollution and vice may reign and rule in the hearts and lives of men? 'Every variety of blasphemy and folly has its apostles; every negation, however audacious or desolating, has its defenders on the platform or in the press; every superstition, however grotesque or discredited, has its fanatical devotees; error, moral and intellectual, stalks abroad everywhere around us, now loudly advertising, now gently insinuating itself—violent, moderate, argumentative, declaratory, all by turns. And is the religion which our Lord has brought from heaven alone to be without its advocates and defenders? Are Christians to be the only people who so weigh and mince their words, who are so fearful of saying too much or of being too enthusiastic, that they will say little or nothing for their Master's Name and Cause?'¹ 'There is one prelate that passeth all the other, and is the most diligent prelate and teacher in all England. And will ye know who it is? I will tell you: it is the devil. He is the most diligent preacher of all other; he is never out of his diocese; he is never from his cure; ye shall never find him

¹ Liddon's *Advent Sermons*, ii. p. 278.

unoccupied; he is ever in his parish; he keepeth residence at all times; ye shall never find him out of his way; call for him when you will, he is ever at home, the diligentest preacher in all the realm. Oh that our prelates would be as diligent to sow the corn of good doctrine as Satan is to sow cockle and darnel!’¹

The Church of England is crippled by her very respectability. Look at many of the churches in the fashionable parts of our towns and cities. Many of them are filled, it is true, from end to end; but where are the poor? Listen to the sermons preached in many of them—elaborate disquisitions, brilliant arguments, ornate essays, eloquent orations—but how much of them is, or can be, understood by the illiterate and ignorant? Where is the food for the starving souls? We congratulate ourselves that our churches are filled; but we often ignore the fact that for one who is a regular worshipper, there are often tens and hundreds who never come at all. ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city,’ souls are perishing there; hungry, though they know not what it is for which they crave; diseased, though their rags hide their sores even from themselves. If to us is committed the Bread of Life, these are the objects on which God would have us lavish it; if He has given us the medicine of immortality, these are the sick whom He longs to make whole. Think you that they will not respond to the offer? ‘Go out quickly’ and try. The Gospel message will be to many of them as new

¹ Bishop Latimer, *Sermon on the Plough*, pp. 117, 118.

as it is when preached by a missionary in a heathen land. Their hearts are, at least, not hardened by that familiarity with Divine truth which is the difficulty presented by many of our regular churchgoers. Tell them that the message is addressed to *them*; that the Gospel Feast is spread for *them*; that Jesus is the Friend of such as *them* (S. Matt. xi. 19); and the words will fall as a Gospel indeed on the ears and hearts of many, and the prophecy of the parable will find in them a fulfilment: 'The poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind' will come gladly to the Feast.

And the commission here given to the servant has a very important and obvious bearing on that Holy Sacrament which is especially called the Lord's Supper. Who are they who may venture to come to mysteries so awful and to a Feast so sacred? Many seem to imagine that none but the saintliest and most perfect must presume to draw near; and when the servant of the Lord goes to others who feel, and even show, that they are far from perfection and unworthy to appear at that Sacred Board, they say, 'We are poor, and maimed, and halt, and blind, therefore we cannot come; we must wait till we are much better before it can be safe for us to come.' Yet here is the Master's commission: 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and *bring in hither* the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.' These are they whom He longs to see at His Table—not indeed those who are careless or indifferent about their unworthiness, nor those who are living in known and wilful sin, which is ever making their pitiable condition worse, but those who 'know the

plague of their own heart' (1 Kings viii. 38), and hunger to be better,—such as these He will accept and welcome. Those whom the servant in the parable called, he bade come just as they were; their rags (as another parable shows us, S. Matt. xxii. 10-12) would be exchanged for robes worthy of the feast provided for them by the master of the house; their hunger and wretchedness would be regarded as claims on his bounty and pity.¹ The most worthy in His sight are they who, even when they have come, confess, 'Lord, we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under Thy table.' When our Lord miraculously fed the five thousand and the four thousand, their need and their helplessness were the only qualifications they were expected to bring. When He instituted that Holy Sacrament, and gave it for the first time to His disciples, they were not very perfect. Just before they had been striving among themselves which of them should be the greatest (S. Luke xxii. 24), and therefore they were lacking in humility, which is the very first of all Christian graces; they had not, as yet at least, learned the lesson which their Lord had specially set them, 'Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart' (S. Matt. xi. 29). And just after they had received it, one of them thrice denied his Lord, and 'all forsook Him and fled'; they lacked, therefore,

¹ 'As the king clothes his guests, the bridegroom his bride (Ps. xlv. 10), so God Himself clothes us with the robe of His righteousness and the garment of salvation (Isa. xli. 10). We may, and we must, when He calls, come just as we are; but we may not, if we would see His face, and enjoy His last Feast, *remain* as we are' (Stier, vol. iii. p. 142).

Christian courage and perseverance. And yet, though their Master foresaw all this (S. John xvi. 32), He said, 'Take, eat,' 'Drink ye all of This.' And it may be had not they been thus fortified before their great struggle, they would have fallen far lower and more irrecoverably, and failed altogether to believe in His Resurrection. If the Master says, 'Come,' and we come, though all unworthy, yet as a matter of obedience to His voice, we shall not be rejected, nor sent empty away.

'O Father of mercy, Who art willing that all men should be saved and come to Thy great supper, exclude me not, I beseech Thee, from Thy trust and favour; but ever guide me by Thy Spirit in Thy ways into Thy kingdom, that I may shun daily more and more pride of life, lust of the flesh, and immoderate cares of the world, and all else which hinders our coming unto Thee. O Lord, I am *poor* in merit, but Thou art rich in mercy; *feeble*, but Thou art my Strength; *halt*, but Thou canst direct my steps and make me tread in Thy paths uprightly; *blind*, but Thou art the Light of the world. Sweet Jesus, draw me, that I may come unto Thee, and run after Thee; that I may taste in this life Thy supper of grace, and be filled in the next with Thy supper of glory. Amen.'

¹

¹ Boys, quoted by Denton.

CHAPTER IX

St. Luke xiv. 22.

Καὶ εἶπεν ὁ δοῦλος, κύριε, γέγονεν ὡς ἐπέταξας, καὶ ἔτι τόπος ἐστί.

Et ait servus, Domine, factum est ut imperasti, et adhuc locus est.

And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded (what thou didst command is done, *R. V.*), and yet there is room.

IT is to be observed how perfect was the obedience of the servant to his lord's commands. Accustomed to the splendour and sumptuousness of his master's house, and the dignity and honour of the guests who were wont to assemble there, and the respect shown to his lord by the costliness of the dresses in which the guests appeared, it might seem strange to him that his lord should bid him 'go out into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind,' to his great supper—a motley company such as no man cared to receive as guests at his table, but to whom they were glad rather to give some small coin to free themselves from their importunity and relieve themselves of their presence. But no word of question or expostulation is uttered; at once he goes out quickly, as he has been bidden, and executes his lord's command; and returning with the company that he has brought, he says, 'Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded.'

We note here how the servant who has been twice sent forth on his lord's service returns the second time to show his lord what he has done. Such, as we said, is the Christian minister's life ; an alternation of work and rest, of active exertion on his Lord's behalf, and of retirement for communion with his Lord again after his labours. Such a ministry is sure of a blessing ; thus, too, will the spiritual life be duly balanced ; active service for Christ will not dissipate, but rather centralise, the spiritual energies, and contemplative devotion will not degenerate into dreamy indolence or spiritual selfishness ; fresh energies will be continually drawn from the Source of grace and strength ; and the grace thus vouchsafed will be ministered for the welfare of others as well as for the refreshment of his own soul.¹

We note, further, that on this second return the servant is able to announce the success of his mission. Times of sadness and of gladness, of failure and success, are appointed for the ministers of Christ. Sometimes they may 'toil all the night,' at the most likely seasons and with the most unremitting diligence, and yet 'take nothing' ; at other times their boats may 'begin to sink' beneath 'the multitude of fishes' that they have taken (S. Luke v. 5-7). Both are overruled for good,

¹ Hoc siquidem vera et casta contemplatio habet, ut mentem, quam divino igne vehementer succenderit, tanto interdum repleat zelo et desiderio acquirendi Deo qui Eum similiter diligant, ut otium contemplationis pro studio prædicationis libentissime intermittat ; et rursum potita votis, aliquatenus in hac parte tanto ardentius redeat in idipsum, quanto se fructuosius intermisisse meminerit : et etiam sumpto contemplationis gustu, valentius ad conquirenda lucra solita alacritate securrat (S. Bern. in *Cantic.*, Sermon lvii.).

for nothing can take place by chance; in either case, the Master's will is accomplished, though in ways that we see not. Only, as in times of seeming failure they must not lose heart, so in times of success they must not be high-minded, nor attribute to their own skill or diligence the success that has crowned their labours; for this would be to 'sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag' (Habak. i. 16). Neither must they be too sanguine or self-complacent if many come to the Gospel Feast, as if it were enough merely to come. Our Lord adds the warning in the later verses of this same chapter that, to come unto Him and after Him implies a life of self-sacrifice and devotion, without which we cannot be His disciples (verses 25-33). The Gospel net, as He teaches us in another parable (S. Matt. xiii. 47, 48), is sure to bring in bad as well as good. Our work is to let down the net; others will draw it to land and sever between the different kinds. Many followed our Lord as 'He went about doing good'; yet after His Resurrection the number of disciples was but about five hundred in Galilee (1 Cor. xv. 6); and after His Ascension, the number was about an hundred and twenty in Jerusalem (Acts i. 15).

Many in the present day seem to teach that it is sufficient if souls be attracted to Christ; that if their hopes and fears are awakened, and first a sense of sin and then an assurance of salvation is excited in the heart, there is a certainty of conversion and salvation. It is indeed a matter of thankfulness and hope, if 'publican and sinners' can be drawn to Christ's feet, to listen to His teaching, to study His example, and to

partake of 'the plenteousness of His house' (Ps. xxxvi. 8). But there is much to be done before it can be assumed that all who are drawn to partake of the means of grace, or all even who sit down at His Table here, shall be found accepted guests at the Marriage Supper hereafter. The fulness and freeness of the Gospel invitation is the main lesson of the present parable; it pertains to another, delivered later in our Lord's ministry, to show that though 'many are called, few are chosen,' and how strict a scrutiny will be made of those who accept the invitation to the Feast (S. Matt. xxii. 10-14).

Again, we mark the unobtrusive humility with which the servant relates the successful results of his mission. He does not enter into his lord's presence to boast of his obedience, his fidelity, or his success. His words betray no self-consciousness nor self-complacency. He is content to sink himself and his labours altogether and to let his actions speak for him.¹ He says not, 'Lord, I have done,' but 'Lord, it is done,' or, it is come to pass (*γέγονεν*) as thou hast commanded. So our Lord Himself, having cast out the legion of devils from the man possessed, bids him 'go and tell how great things the Lord had done for him' (S. Mark. v. 19).²

¹ Detrahenda est inanis jactatio: res loquentur, nobis tacentibus (Senec. *de Benef.* lib. ii. c. 11).

'Speaking in deeds, and deedless in his tongue.'

Troilus and Cressida.

² Advertendum hic est, non dixisse Dominum, Vade et narra quanta Ego tibi fecerim, sed Vade et narra quanta fecerit tibi Deus; quibus certe nos docet, ut omnes actiones nostras in Deum referamus, quæ aliquid bonitatis habuerint (Stella, *Enarr.* in cap. viii. Evang. Lucæ).

The best and most faithful servant is still an 'unprofitable servant' (S. Luke xvii. 10); even when he has 'done all that is commanded him,' he has only 'done that which it was his duty to do.' However excellent his gifts, however assiduous his diligence, though 'Paul may plant, and Apollos may water,' he knows that 'neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase' (1 Cor. iii. 6, 7); and he will ever be the first to acknowledge, 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name be the praise, for Thy lovingkindness and for Thy truth's sake' (Ps. cxv. 1).

We note, further, how fully the servant enters into his lord's wishes and purposes. He knows that his lord, having prepared 'a great supper,' wishes that his 'house may be filled'; and so, when he has brought in those whom he has found, and sees that many places are yet vacant, he says, 'And yet there is room.' He cannot bear that his lord's provision should be wasted, nor that any of those who would be thankful to be filled should be left out unprovided for. It is so with every true servant of the Lord. His daily prayer is, 'Thy kingdom come'; his soul yearns for his Master's glory and the salvation of souls. There is a missionary spirit in every true Christian, and his greatest delight is in bringing others to Jesus; and the more God blesses his endeavours, the more he thirsts for the progress of His Master's kingdom, and the filling of his Master's House.

'And yet there is room.'—This is a confession that has to be made by every faithful servant of Christ. In every church, it is true, there is less accommodation

than would be required if all came who ought to come, but often with this limited accommodation there is generally 'yet room' for more than are present; and as the minister surveys the empty seats, he longs to see them filled with those who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness. So at the Supper of the Lord, how few comparatively are present! At every Celebration it might be said, 'And yet there is room,' and many a sad hour is spent by the 'steward of the mysteries of God' as he thinks of the provisions of Christ's grace so richly prepared, and yet so lukewarmly received.

But, to apply these words to the Gospel Feast in general, the words 'yet there is room' imply that some have already embraced the Gospel offer and obeyed the Gospel call. But though, as our Lord foretold, 'many' have 'come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and have sat down in the kingdom of God' (S. Luke xiii. 29), and though many are pressing in day by day, 'yet there is room.' And so long as there is one Noah to be saved in the Ark, one Lot to be brought out of Sodom, one Samaritan to be brought to the heavenly Zion, the door of the kingdom shall not be finally shut, but for every sin-laden and sin-weary soul 'yet there is room.' And though in our Father's House above there shall be 'a multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues' (Rev. vii. 9), yet that countless multitude cannot exhaust the infinite capacities of that blessed place. Of this world's goods, the more there are to partake, the less there is for each; as S. Chrysostom says, 'In worldly

wealth one is not made rich without another being impoverished, but in spiritual things not one is made rich without enriching others; for in earthly matters participation lessens, in spiritual increases wealth.' 'Come,' says S. Augustine, 'His House is not too narrow for thee; the kingdom of God is possessed equally by all and wholly by each one; it is not diminished by the increasing number of those who possess it. Heaven is not divided, and that which is possessed by many with one heart is whole and entire for each one.'¹ God Himself is the Source and Centre and Substance of heavenly joy, and the soul's happiness consists in being 'filled with all the fulness of God' (Eph. iii. 19). There will be, indeed, degrees of blessedness there; for though the saved shall 'shine as the stars for ever and ever' (Dan. xii. 3), yet 'one star differeth from another star in glory' (1 Cor. xv. 41). All shall be full of happiness, but the degree of their happiness will be according to their capacity of receiving it. The Fountain is inexhaustible; but the vessels, though all filled, will contain some more, and some less. The glories and beauties

¹ S. Aug. *Serm.* xxxviii. Quam quidem beatitudinem non invidemus tibi; nec enim communicata tibi, nobis minuitur: nec nostri proinde termini restringuntur, si et tu regnaveris. Quonam vero invidiæ poterit esse, ubi sortium magnitudini consortium multitudo nihil detrahit? (S. Bernard, *Ep.* ciii.). 'Their inheritance is such as is not lessened by the multitude of heirs; it is entire to each one. And that grace and salvation that flows from Christ, the "Sun of Righteousness," is as the light of the sun when it shines; none hath the less because of others partaking of it. The happiness of the saints is called an "inheritance in light," which all may enjoy without abatement to any' (Archbishop Leighton's *Works*, vol. ii. p. 413).

of that other world will be open to the eyes of all, but some will understand and appreciate them more than others, just as an artistic perception will discover beauties in a landscape which are not discerned, or only imperfectly, by those who are not similarly endowed. But because God is heaven—‘whom have I in heaven but thee?’ (Ps. lxxiii. 25)—and God is Infinite and Eternal, there never could come a time when it should cease to be true that ‘yet there is room.’

But we gather from Scripture that, in the counsels of God, there is a certain ‘number of the elect’ which, when it is ‘accomplished,’ shall comprise all that will be admitted into His kingdom. It was a common idea with the Fathers of the Church that the number of the saved among men should exactly fill up the places in heaven which were left vacant by the fall of Satan and his hosts;¹ and, in this sense, some of them interpret those words of our Lord, ‘they are equal to the angels’ (*ἰσάγγελοι*, S. Luke xx. 36); as S. Augustine says, ‘that out of the renewal of a part of it (mankind) should be supplied whatever loss that fall of the devil had brought on the fellowship of the angels. For this hath been promised to the saints at their resurrection, ‘They shall be equal to the angels of God.’² In like manner they interpret the words in Deut. xxxii. 8, ‘He set the bounds of the people

¹ S. Aug. *de fid., spe, et carit.* 16. Qui de mortali progenie merito justeque damnatâ tantum populum gratia sua colligit, ut inde suppleat et instauret partem, quæ lapsa est angelorum, ac sic illa dilecta et superna civitas non fraudetur suorum numero civium, quin etiam fortassis et uberiore lætetur (*Ibid. de Civ. Dei*, l. xxii. c. 1).

² *De fid., spe, et carit.* 9.

according to the number of the children of Israel'; or, as the LXX. render it, 'of the angels of God.'¹ But S. Anselm, after a lengthy discussion of the subject, while he admits that the number of the elect among men shall complete the number of the angels, concludes that 'greater will be the number of the elect of mankind than was that of the fallen angels.'²

But, be this as it may, we are assured by our Lord not only that there is room for us there, but that He is gone up thither as our Forerunner to 'prepare a place for' us (S. John xiv. 2).³ But if the number of those who shall obtain admittance is limited to a certain number, and this is 'the last time' (1 S. John ii. 18), and the number of the elect is daily being filled up, it is not to be wondered at that we have so many and urgent exhortations to accept and appropriate this blessedness while it is within our reach, and to secure a place and a portion in the heavenly kingdom while 'yet there is room.'

For there may be room for myriads more in heaven, even when the last shall have entered, and yet there may be no room for us. That word 'yet' (ἔτι) seems

¹ *Superna illa civitas ex angelis et hominibus constat, ad quam tantum credimus humanum genus ascendere, quantos illic contigit electos angelos remansisse, ut scriptum est, statuit terminos gentium juxta numerum angelorum Dei (S. Greg. Hom. xxxiv. in Evang.). 'Legitur de Deo, Constituit terminos populorum juxti numerum filiorum Israel: quod quidam, quia pro "filiorum Israel" invenitur "angelorum Dei," sic exponunt, ut secundum numerum bonorum angelorum assumendus intelligatur numerus electorum hominum (S. Anselm, Cur Deus Homo, i. 18).*

² *Plures homines electos futuros quam sint mali angeli (Ibid.).*

³ ἔτι τόπος ἐστί. So of the heavenly mansions of His Father's House He says, πορεύομαι ἐτοιμασαι τόπον ὑμῖν.

to imply that in a little while the last will have been admitted, and 'the door' shall be 'shut' (S. Matt. xxv. 10). But that door is not yet closed, and we are invited to enter. The command and the promise are addressed to us, 'Knock, and it shall be opened unto you' (S. Matt. vii. 7). But it will be too late to knock, however loudly, and to cry, 'Lord, Lord, open to us,' however earnestly, 'when once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut-to the door' (S. Luke xiii. 25).

'Who may the horror but in dream abide,
Breathless to knock, and by the portal wait,
Where saints have pass'd behind their glorious Guide,
Then feel, not hear, the sad, drear word, Too late.'¹

Our Lord solemnly warns us of that day and that hour, telling us that the many shall be excluded through their own fault and folly, and only 'few shall find' admission; and therefore He bids us 'strive, or agonize' (ἀγωνίζεσθε) 'to enter in' (S. Luke xiii. 24); for 'the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force' (S. Matt. xi. 12).

It is a common and most true saying that we do not value our blessings as we ought to do till we have lost them:² sickness reveals to us the blessing of health,

¹ *Lyra Innocentium.*

² Tunc denique omnes nostra intelligimus bona
Quum quæ in potestate habuimus, ea amisimus.

Plaut. *Capt.* i. 2.

'It so falls out
That what we have we prize not to the worth
Whiles we enjoy it, but being lack'd and lost,
Why, then we rack the value, then we find
The virtue that Possession could not show us
Whiles it was ours.'

Much Ado about Nothing, Act iv. sc. 1.

bereavement the dearness of friends, pecuniary losses the comfort of competence. How bitter will be the remorse and self-reproach of the lost when they wake up in the next world to see, for the first time, the value of the treasure which they despised when it might have been theirs !

But it is of the present time that the words of the parable are spoken, 'Yet there is room.' Since the day of Pentecost millions have been added, in each succeeding century, to the Church; for the Church of Christ is catholic, not only as teaching all truth necessary to salvation, but also as including believers from all ages and countries.¹ Eden would have been too small if man had continued and multiplied there; Noah's Ark would have been too narrow if many of those who were disobedient had, in answer to his warnings, fled from the wrath to come; the Jewish Church was too exclusive to receive into its bosom all those whom the counsel of God has elected to salvation; but in the Church of Christ there is room for all.

And as the servant of Christ beholds the millions who are yet not evangelised, nor called to the Gospel

¹ 'It (the Church) is called catholic, because it is throughout the world from one end to the other; because it teaches universally and completely one and all the doctrines which ought to come to men's knowledge concerning things both visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly; because it subjugates in order to godliness every class of men, governors and governed, learned and unlearned; and because it so universally treats and heals every sort of sin, whether committed by soul or body, and possesses in itself every form of virtue which is named, both in deeds and words, and every kind of spiritual gifts' (S. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat. Lect.* 18).

Feast, his heart yearns with holy zeal for the further spread of the Gospel, and says to his Lord, 'And yet there is room.' 'There is bread enough and to spare,' and yet millions 'perish with hunger' (S. Luke xv. 17). 'The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few' (S. Matt. ix. 37). In heathen countries 'there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed' (Josh. xiii. 1); in our own how many are its dark and desolate places, and how dark and desolate they are! The Supper of the Gospel is indeed great, and 'all things are now ready,' and yet there are myriads in 'the highways and hedges' famished and starving. Many places at the Feast are yet vacant because many who were invited have refused to come; many also are vacant because the invitation has not yet been given, as our Lord commanded, 'to every creature' (S. Mark xvi. 15). What scope there is, therefore, for prayer and for effort that His 'House may be filled'!

CHAPTER X

S. Luke xiv. 23.

Καὶ εἶπεν ὁ κύριος πρὸς τὸν δοῦλον, Ἐξελθε εἰς τὰς ὁδοὺς καὶ φραγμοὺς, καὶ ἀνάγκασον εἰσελθεῖν, ἵνα γεμισθῇ ὁ οἶκός μου.

Et ait dominus servo, Exi in vias et sepes, et compelle intrare, ut impleatur domus mea.

And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel (*R. V.* constrain) them to come in, that my house may be filled.

THESE words intimate a new departure in the proclamation of the Gospel offers, and show that God had a larger and wider purpose of grace than could be satisfied by the coming in of a part and remnant of the Jewish people; that at the 'feast of good things' which He had 'prepared before the face of all people' (S. Luke ii. 31) more should sit down than they; that His Church, which He was about to build (S. Matt. xvi. 18), should gather into itself the Gentiles also, who hitherto had been 'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise' (Eph. ii. 12); and that they should become 'fellow-heirs, and of the same body' (iii. 6), 'fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God' (ii. 19). This is, indeed, not expressly declared, though it is implied, in this parable; the time was not yet come for unfolding plainly so great a 'mystery' (iii. 4-6), but it lay wrapped up therein, and, like so much in Scripture, was biding its time.¹

¹ Archbishop Trench.

As the servant had told his master that 'yet there was room,' and as 'grace will endure a vacuum as little as nature,'¹ he at once receives a fresh and more comprehensive commission to go and seek for other guests, now no longer in 'the streets and lanes of the city,' but in 'the highways and hedges' beyond. Where we may observe how our Lord sets before us the yearnings of His love for souls; that He will leave nothing undone that can be done for their salvation; that the refusal of some only serves to make Him extend His call to others; and that however many may treat His invitation with contempt and indifference, and forfeit their share in His love and mercy, yet eventually, at the time fixed by His own counsels, His 'House shall be filled.'

'And the lord said unto the servant.'—We observe here the intercourse between the lord and his servant. 'The servant said,' in the preceding verse is answered by, 'The lord said to the servant' in this. And so long as this precious and blessed intercourse between the Lord and His servants is uninterrupted, a continuous current of communication passes between heaven and earth.

'Go out.'—From contemplation and communion with his master, the servant is again summoned to active service in his behalf. New ground must now be trodden. Of those within the city, the lowest and worst have come to the Feast, while the rulers have 'rejected the counsel of God against themselves' (S. Luke vii. 29, 30), and having 'put away the Word of God from them, have judged themselves unworthy

¹ Nec natura nec gratia patitur vacuum esse (Bengel).

of everlasting life' (Acts xiii. 46). But 'though Israel be not gathered, yet God will be glorious' (Isa. xlix. 5); and though 'the first are become last, and the last first' (S. Matt. xx. 16), yet 'the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand' (Prov. xix. 21); for 'the unbelief of man shall not make the faith of God of none effect' (Rom. iii. 3). The promise shall now be fulfilled, 'I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession' (Ps. ii. 8). 'It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved' (marg. desolations) 'of Israel; I will also give Thee for a Light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth' (Isa. xlix. 6).

This part of the parable is evidently prophetic. Our Lord Himself never went beyond 'the coasts' of the heathen world; for He was 'not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (S. Matt. xv. 24). And when the twelve were sent forth by Him during the days of His ministry, He strictly charged them, 'Go ye not into the way¹ of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not' (S. Matt. x. 5). Even after His Resurrection, though He bade the eleven 'go and make disciples of all nations' (S. Matt. xxviii. 19), and 'go into all the world, and preach the Gospel unto every creature' (S. Mark xvi. 15), yet, even on the eve of His Ascension, He 'commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father' (Acts i. 4). And even after they had received the

¹ *eis ôððν ἐθνῶν*, as here, *eis τὰς ὁδοὺς*.

promised Comforter, they were gradually to extend the sphere of their work, 'beginning at Jerusalem' (S. Luke xxiv. 47), and going on from thence first to the places near, and then to the regions more remote. 'Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth' (Acts i. 8). So here the servant is now bidden to 'go out into the highways and hedges' beyond the city; for, as S. Peter says, 'The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to *all that are afar off*, even as many as the Lord our God shall call' (ii. 39). This mission, therefore, must refer to the post-Pentecostal work of the Church; and it is the last commission given to the servant in the parable, and there is no intimation given of his return. It is to last till 'the consummation of all things'; the missionary work of the Church is to go on widening and increasing; the servant of the Lord (His appointed ministry), busying himself to the end in executing this, his Lord's last commission, and only returning to give in his account when, the harvest of the world being gathered, his work for Christ shall be done.

'*Into the highways and hedges.*'¹—By these we understand the Gentile world, for they are not enclosed in the city, but as countrymen are dispersed and exposed to the spoil of the enemy, in 'the highways' of this world's prosperity, and in 'the hedges' of

¹ 'Religion did at first take place in cities, and in that respect was a cause why the name of Pagans, which properly signifies country people, came to be used in common speech for the same that infidels and unbelievers were' (Hooker, *Eccles. Pol.* bk. v. c. lxxi. 9).

adversity.¹ Or, ‘the highways’ may be taken to represent the broad well-trodden ways of the world, the open and notorious thoroughfares of sin; ‘the hedges,’ the more secret offenders against God. Theophylact considers these ‘hedges’ to be the separations which sin has made between us and God; and that the Gentiles, living in sin, were not in the one Way, but in the many ways of lawlessness and homelessness.’² S. Augustine, somewhat differently says: ‘The Gentiles came from “the streets and lanes”; let the heretics come from the hedges; here they shall find peace. For those who make hedges, their object is to make divisions; let these be drawn from the hedges, let them be plucked up from among the thorns. They have stuck fast in the hedges; they are unwilling to be compelled. “Let us come in,” they say, “of our own goodwill. This is not the Lord’s order. “Compel them,” saith He, “to come in.” Let compulsion be found outside, the will will arise within.’³ Zuccolius says: ‘Those are among the hedges who are out of the way; that is, who have not been admitted by Holy Baptism into the Church of Christ, and who are among the thorns of divers opinions; and as among the thorns are the

¹ Per vias et sepes intelligitur vocatio gentilium, qui, tanquam agrestes, in viis et sepibus erant dispersi et direptioni hostium expositi: in viis, scilicet, mundanæ prosperitatis, et sepibus adversitatis (Ludolph, *Vita Jesu Christi*). Sepes mendicorum parietes (Bengel).

² τὰ δὲ ἔθνη ξένα τῶν διαθηκῶν ὄντα, καὶ ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς νομοθεσίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ μὴ συμπολεῖται ὄντες τῶν ἀγίων, οὐκ ἐν μιᾷ ὁδῷ, ἀλλὰ πολλαῖς τῆς ἀνομίας καὶ ἀνοικίας διέτριβον, καὶ ἐν τοῖς φραγμοῖς, ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις φημί· ἡ γὰρ ἀμαρτία μέγας φραγμὸς, καὶ μεσότοιχον διῴστων ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ (*Enarr.* in *Evang.* S. Lucæ).

³ Serm. lxii. S.

miserable Gentiles, so are the obstinate Jews, and also pertinacious and perverse heretics.¹ Coster explains this 'going out' into the highways and hedges as intimating that the minister of Christ is not only to aim at converting sinners, and so bringing them back to the Church from which they have wandered, but also to gather in those who are without the Church—Jews, infidels, heretics, and the excommunicated.²

'And compel them to come in.'—The nature and method of the compulsion here commanded have given rise to much and varied disquisition. Some would conclude that any and every means may legitimately be employed to bring men into the way of truth; but, as opinions have widely varied as to what *is* the truth, men have inferred from our Lord's words that even violent measures may be used to bring others into what *they* have considered the right way; hence persecution has been vindicated as a necessary compulsion to those who would not otherwise conform. Lord Macaulay says: 'The doctrine which, from the first origin of religious dissensions, has been held by all bigots of all sects, when condensed into a few words and stripped of rhetorical disguise, is simply this: I am in the right, and you are in the wrong. When you are the stronger, you ought to tolerate me; for it is your duty to tolerate

¹ Sunt inter sepes, qui sunt extra vias: et sunt inter spinas opinionum multarum. Ut inter has spinas atque sepes sint miseri Gentiles, sint obstinati Judæi, atque sint etiam pertinaces hæretici (*Hom. in Evang. S. Lucæ*).

² Exit is, qui non in Ecclesiam tantum peccatores convertit, sed et extra Ecclesiam infideles, Judæos, hæreticos, excommunicatos (quoted by Denton).

the weak ; but when I am the stronger, I shall persecute you ; for it is my duty to persecute error.'¹

In these days of religious toleration it is, perhaps, difficult to do justice to the principle which actuated the zealots of past ages in their violent and bloody persecutions. We live in times when it is popular to decry all religious zeal and enthusiasm ; and it is common to hear the maintenance of dogma branded with the name of bigotry, and it is counted narrow-minded and intolerant to refuse to include all the most opposite and antagonistic forms of belief, misbelief, and unbelief in a common farrago of so-called 'undenominational Christianity.'² And it is not easy to understand the stern and rigorous attitude maintained in earlier times by those brave warriors who, with unflinching and uncompromising steadfastness, so 'earnestly contended for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints' (S. Jude 3). A spurious charity and a false liberality, applauded as tokens of a broad mind and a generous concession to the views and feelings of others, have done much to disparage the bold courage and faithfulness which braced the nerves and produced the exploits of 'the noble army of martyrs.' It is true that those champions of the faith may, in some cases, have shown a narrow-mindedness and one-sidedness which prevented them from seeing other aspects of the truth. There are few human minds large enough to discern how many-sided truth really is ; and no human mind is able to see all its aspects. Often those who

¹ Essay on Mackintosh's *Hist. of Revolution*.

² 'The most sectarian and bigoted of all creeds—undenominationalism' (*Church Times*, Aug. 25, 1893).

see most round a truth are condemned as lukewarm and inconsistent, because they are not content with the shibboleths of a party, and can sympathise with and approve of the discoveries of other seekers after truth. But, on the other hand, more allowance and more honour should be given to men who are, possibly, contracted in their views, but who are determined, at whatever cost, to maintain the portion of truth which they see and value. Much more respect seems due to the man, though a zealot and a bigot, who holds more precious than life itself what he conscientiously believes to be the truth, than to him who has little hold on truth at all, or who, if he believes that there is such a thing as definite truth, is content to think that all opinions are one as good as another, and while tolerating all is faithful to none.¹

The prevalence of religious persecution, of one kind or another, in all ages of the Church, might teach us that, amidst much of unnecessary and revolting atrocity, there must be a residuum of right and holy feeling; and the more so, as among the most intolerant of persecutors have been found men of otherwise meek and placable and gentle natures.² They may have

¹ 'There are few signs in a soul's state more alarming than that of religious indifference, that is, the spirit of thinking all religions equally true—the real meaning of which is, that all religions are equally false' (F. W. Robertson, *Sermons*, vol. iv. p. 169). 'It is a weakness to be hot in a cold matter, but it is a wickedness to be cold in a hot matter' (Trapp on Esther iv. 8).

² 'It is painful to think that the first emperor who sanctioned the persecution of Christians by law was Trajan, and that the first magistrate who put the law in force was Pliny; both of these persons, according to heathen notions of morality, being considered amiable and lovers of justice' (Burton).

argued that if men could not or would not know the way of truth (or what they conscientiously believed such), and if destruction must be the consequence of continuing in the paths of error, it was a mistaken kindness, not only to the offenders, but to all who were likely to be affected by their example and influence, to allow them to continue any longer in such danger. Such, S. Jude tells us, we should 'save with fear, pulling them out of the fire' (verse 23); and our Lord, after His Ascension, sending messages by S. John to the angels of the Churches of Pergamos and Thyatira, blames them for suffering false teachers to seduce others by their doctrine and practice (Rev. ii. 14-16, 20). They might argue that 'charity to the soul is the soul of charity';¹ and, therefore, just as one would not hesitate to drag a man even with violence who was sleeping in a burning house or standing on the edge of a precipice, or who was deliberately intending to commit suicide, so much more is one justified in compelling men, even by the most summary measures, to leave the paths of error and turn into the way of truth. In this way a Roman Catholic, believing that there is no salvation outside the pale of that Church, might say that the atrocities of the Inquisition or of the Marian persecutions were not only lawful, but laudable. It might also be argued that God Himself is wont by adversities and afflictions to compel men to return to Him; as it is written, 'I will go and return unto My place, till they acknowledge their offences, and seek My Face: in their affliction they will seek Me

¹ Caryl, on Job iv. 3.

early' (Hos. v. 15); and all the grievous judgments and captivities which befel the Jews were not merely punishments for their national sins, but persuasives to national repentance. So S. Anselm and S. Gregory the Great argue; the latter expressly saying, 'Those who, broken by adversities of this world, return to the love of God, are compelled to come in.'¹ Luther also (as quoted by Archbishop Trench, in addition to those already named) says, 'They are compelled to come in, when the Law is broadly preached, terrifying their consciences, and drawing them to Christ as their only Refuge and Hope.'

But, in the first place, God's actions are not always authority for us to do the same; and besides, we must remember that nations, as such, can only be rewarded or punished here on earth for national rectitude or revolt. As Archbishop Tillotson says: 'Though as to particular persons, the providences of God are promiscuously administered in this world, because there is another world of rewards and punishments for them; yet it is not with nations as such, but national virtues are ordinarily rewarded with temporal blessings, and national sins punished with temporal judgments; because public bodies and communities of men, as such, can be rewarded and punished only in this world, for in the next they will all be dissolved.'²

The propagation of religion by the sword, or by any form of violence and persecution, carries its condemna-

¹ Qui ergo, hujus mundi adversitatibus fracti ad Dei amorem redeunt, compelluntur ut intrent! (*Hom.* xxxvi. in *Evang.*)

² *Works*, vol. i. Sermon. iii. on Prov. xiv. 34.

tion on the face of it.¹ Conversion, by such means, is, in the first place, obviously likely to be unreal. Men may, of course, by fear be compelled to simulate adherence to the terms forced upon them, and there may be thus brought about an uniformity in religious observances which may give an appearance of unity and concord; but, from the nature of the case, men will inwardly hold more jealously and tenaciously the opinions, the outward expression of which they are obliged to stifle, and will be led to regard with hatred opinions which they might otherwise have tolerated in others, though they would not entertain them themselves. Moreover, such a course of action is intrinsically opposed to the whole teaching of Christ and His religion. He declared, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight' (S. John xviii. 36). When S. Peter, at what seemed the most critical juncture of the Church's very existence, drew the sword to defend its Founder and its first adherents from death and destruction, He bade him, 'Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?' (S. John xviii. 11.) If tares appear among the wheat, it is a natural impulse to say, 'Wilt thou that we go and gather them up?' but the answer is, 'Nay; let both grow together till the harvest.' S. Paul, zealous as he was for the propagation of the Gospel, and jealous for his Master's honour, which was

¹ Sed nec religionis est, cogere religionem, quæ sponte suscipi debeat, non vi (Tertull. *ad Scapulam lib.*). Defendenda est non occidendo, sed moriendo (Lactant. *Instit.* v. 20).

assailed, even then, by persecutions from without and by heresies from within, says, 'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal' (2 Cor. x. 4). There may be occasions when the temporal sword may be lawfully used in defence of religion, as when fanatical excesses are occasion of blasphemy and of injury to the State; but it ought to be only as a last extremity, and then only sparingly and reluctantly employed. As Bishop Butler says: 'Indeed, it is said in the Book of Job that the worship of the sun and moon was "an iniquity to be punished of the judge"' (xxx. 26-28). And this, though it is not so much as a precept, much less a general one, is, I think, the only passage of Scripture which can with any colour be alleged in favour of persecution of any sort; for what the Jews did, or were commanded to do, under their Theocracy, are both quite out of the case.'¹ 'There be two swords,' says Lord Bacon, 'amongst Christians—the spiritual and temporal—and both have their office and place in the maintenance of religion; but we may not take up the third sword, which is Mahomet's sword, or like unto it; that is, to propagate religion by wars, or by sanguinary persecutions to force consciences, except it be in cases of overt scandal, blasphemy, or intermixture of practice against the State.'² Liddon says: 'If ever Christians have forgotten the spirit of their Master's Word, and the power of His doctrine, and have invoked the proselytism of the sceptre, or the worse proselytism of the sword, this has been mainly in dark times, or in diseased and enfeebled Churches. As a rule, in the

¹ *Sermons*, pp. 282, 283.

² *Unity of Religion*.

primitive, in the mediæval, in the modern period, the Church has trusted herself to the words of Christ, and has really triumphed just so far as she has done so.¹ Other kings may and must be content with outward obedience, however grudging and sullen, to their laws; and as long as the people utter acclamations with their lips, they cannot be impeached by the civil law if they mutter execrations against the government which they abhor. But the throne of Christ is erected only in the hearts and wills of His subjects; a forced subjection He reckons as rebellion; and He condemns those who 'draw near to Him with their lips, while their heart is far from Him' (S. Matt. xv. 7, 8). Every soldier in His army must be a volunteer, and every heart in which He reigns He 'makes willing in the day of His power' (Ps. cx. 3). Hence in every true soldier and servant of Christ there is kindled an enthusiasm of loyalty such as no earthly king can command,² an enthusiasm which prompts the unhesitating surrender of property, friends, family, life itself, if such a sacrifice can in any way advance the progress of His kingdom, and testify his love and loyalty of his King. 'Religious wars and persecutions are both utterly alien from the spirit of Christianity. James and John, who would have called down fire; Peter, who smote off the ear of Malchus, both thought and did in the spirit of the

¹ *Clerical Life and Work*, p. 284.

² Reges terræ in subditos imperium habent per potentiam suam, raro tamen aut nunquam eorum voluntatibus dominantur. Sed modus quo nobis Deus dominatur, est totum Sibi subicere hominem, et in animam per amorem Sese intromittere, et ab illâ super omnia diligere (Stella, *Enarr.* in cap. xi. Evang. Lucæ).

Jewish, not of the Christian economy, and were herein types of the Dominicans who would convert or destroy by the rack and the flames, and of the zealots of later times who, in fighting for religious liberty, shouted as their war-cry, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon."¹ The advocates and abettors of religious persecution are reprov'd even by the wisdom and commonsense of the heathen moralist, who reminds us that the mind of man is naturally so impatient of control that, while it will follow, it will not be forced.²

Hence, we cannot regard the words, 'Compel them to come in,' to be any sanction for a forcible constraint. 'The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God' (S. James i. 20); we are exhorted and commanded to try every means *short of violence*, to show all earnestness, diligence, entreaty, to persuade men to come in, and that for their highest interest and happiness. As Archbishop Trench observes, 'How can we imagine this single servant (for he is one throughout) driving before him, and that from the country into the city, a flock of unwilling guests, and these, too, gathered from those rude and lawless men unto whom he is now sent?' The compulsion here spoken of is, therefore, a moral one, a power exercised on the will which induces it, by its

¹ Bishop Harold Browne, *On the Creed*, pp. 206, 207. *Approbamus zelum, sed factum non suademus: quia fides suadenda est, non imponenda. Quanquam melius procul dubio gladio coercentur, illius videlicet qui non sine causâ gladium portat, quam in suum errorem multos tragicere permittantur: Dei enim minister ille est, vindex in iram ei qui male egit* (S. Bernard in *Cantica*, Serm. lxvi.).

² *Naturâ contumax est humanus animus, et in contrarium atque arduum nititur, sequiturque facilius quam ducitur* (Senec. *de Clem.* lib. i. c. 24).

own enlightened choice, to accept what is offered, and to appropriate, by the free exercise of its own judgment, the blessings which are proposed to it; for, as Tertullian observes, ‘it is agreed on all hands that forced or unwilling services are not grateful either to God or man.’¹ Stier remarks, ‘The invariable and indispensable *εἰσελθεῖν* is connected with the *ἀνάγκασον*, in order to obviate any perversion’; the ‘coming in’ is the exercise of the soul’s own will, and no extraneous ‘compulsion’ can restrain its freedom. And so the word is often used both in classical writers² and in Scripture.³ S. Augustine, indeed, was convinced by the unquiet and contentious humour of the Donatists and Circumcellians, and by the good effect which the Emperor’s edicts afterwards had on them, that moderate penalties inflicted on turbulent schismatics was useful. And Calvin says: ‘I do not disapprove of the use which S. Augustine makes of that passage, “Compel them to come in,” against the Donatists, to prove that godly princes may lawfully issue edicts for *compelling* obstinate and rebellious persons to worship the true God, and to maintain the unity of the faith; for though faith is voluntary, yet we see that

¹ *Apology*, cap. xxiv.

² As in Thucyd. vi. 11.

³ ‘With much fair speech she caused him to yield; with the flattering of her lips she forced him’ (*ἠνάγκασεν*, Prov. vii. 21). When our Lord ‘constrained’ (*ἠνάγκασεν*) ‘His disciples to get into a ship’ (S. Matt. xiv. 22; S. Mark vi. 41); or when S. Peter ‘compelled’ (*ἀναγκάζεις*) ‘the Gentiles to walk as did the Jews’ (Gal. ii. 14), the compulsion was, as Oosterzee says, moral, not physical; ‘not the manner in which Saul was zealous for Judaism, but that in which he was zealous for Christianity, must be the model of him who would enter into the spirit of this “*compelle intrare*.” The house must be filled with such as are neither dragged nor carried in, but persuaded to enter by the power of love.’

such methods are useful for subduing the obstinacy of those who will not yield until they are compelled.¹ Stella also vindicates the use of the sword against those who are enemies of the faith as a 'most holy' work.²

But such methods are apt to advertise and give an importance, a vitality, and an endurance to false opinions which often they would not otherwise obtain; and it is to be remembered that suppression is a very different thing from subversion. We may lament, in our own branch of the Church, the prevalence of Dissent; but, in these days of religious liberty (not to say, licence), it would be an anachronism and an absurdity to demolish the chapels or subject chapel-goers to civil penalties. And in the several parishes it is generally felt to be a mistake to actively oppose it or publicly censure it. Error is best combated and conquered by the propagation of the truth.³ Heresies are

¹ *Comm. on Harm.* of the Evang., lib. ii. p. 173.

² Sanctissimum ergo est contra peccatores bellare, et multo melius pro fide contra Turcas et Saracenos, et optimum contra hæreticos, qui Turcis deteriores sunt (*Enarr.* on cap. iii. Evang. Lucæ).

³ 'You will say, it is necessary, in order to the defence of the truth, to oppose error and blunt the weapons of sophists. Be it so; but our disputes ought to be managed with few words, for naked truth is most effectual for its own defence, and when it is once well understood, its natural light dispels all the darkness of error' (Archbishop Leighton, *Works*, vol. ii. p. 624). 'Never can an error be permanently destroyed by the roots until we have planted by its side the truth that is to take its place. S. Paul at Athens disengaged the truth from the error; proclaimed the truth, and left the errors to themselves; the truth grew up, and the errors silently and slowly withered' (F. W. Robertson). 'It is an endless task to be refuting error. Plant truth, and the error will pine away' (*ibid.* *Sermons*, vol. iii. p. 62). 'I believe it will be found that nothing has contributed more to make the dissenting, non-conforming party considerable than their being thought so. It

but the creatures of the night; and 'when the sun ariseth, they get them away together, and lay them down in their dens' (Ps. civ. 22).

Dean Alford says on this word 'compel': 'Is there not an allusion to Infant Baptism? for, remember, the *εἰσελθόντες* are good and bad (S. Matt. xxii. 10).' And this suggestion opens the question as to what degree of compulsion may be exerted in the case not only of infants, but also of all children under the age of discretion. It is not an uncommon thing to hear people in these days argue against the religious education of children, on the ground that it seems unfair and undesirable to bring them up in the tenets of the Church, or indeed of any religious denomination, thus giving their minds a necessary bias and prejudice in favour of such religious opinions;¹ and that they ought

has been our courting and treating with them that has made them stand upon their own terms, instead of coming over to ours' (South, *Sermons*, vol. v. p. 561). 'It is desirable that as far as possible we should give up polemics. By this we should lose little; for the best polemic is the positive and constructive statement of one's own belief' (Canon Sanday, *Sermon on Reunion*). 'S. Francis de Sale laid down certain rules for himself: one was, never to preach controversial sermons. "He who preaches love," he would say, "is opposing heresy without saying one controversial word"' (Sidney Lear, *Life of S. Francis de Sale*). 'Nimium altercando veritas amittitur' (Pub. Syrus, *apud Aul. Gell.*). 'Unity is not uniformity; unity is harmony, uniformity is monotony. Do not stickle for uniformity so long as unity is secured' (Dean Goulburn). 'First recognise what is true; we shall *then* discern what is false, and properly not till then' (Carlyle, *Lect. on Heroes*). 'Unity implies distinction and differences' (Hare's *Victory of Faith*, p. 236).

Nunc adhibe puro

Pectore verba, puer, nunc de melioribus offer.

Quo semel est imbuta recens servabit odorem

Testa diu.

(Hor. *Ep.*, lib. i. 2, 67-70.)

Altius præcepta descendunt, quo teneris imprimuntur ætatibus

to be left till they are able to decide for themselves, by the exercise of their own judgment, observation, and experience, which form of religious opinion (if any) commends itself to their impartial acceptance. This might be plausible enough if our world were unfallen, and our nature innocent as it was created. But in all such theories and speculations on this and kindred subjects, it is of the utmost importance that we bear in mind the sad fact that it is otherwise. And, being what we are, it is just as unreasonable to argue thus, as for a farmer to say that it was unfair to prejudice the soil in favour of wheat, barley, or oats, and that he would therefore leave it fallow till he saw what the soil was most suited to grow. As he would find that his field would yield a spontaneous growth of thorns and thistles,¹ and that, when these were sprung up, it

(Senec. *de consol. ad Helv.* c. 16). ‘While in earliest infancy, the affections, the great auxiliaries of religion, are most impressible, in earliest infancy, too, the passions, which are the great antagonists of religion, are most easily regulated and controlled. . . . Another reason why the earliest age is the best age for the conveyance of religion is this : that the young mind is the most flexible and tender, the most apt to receive with accuracy the stamp impressed upon it, and not only the most apt to receive, but the most certain to retain. Contraries are here united—the softness of wax with the tenacity of marble’ (Bishop Jebb).

¹ Neglectis urenda filix innascitur agris (Hor. *Sat. I.* iii. 37). ‘Mr. Thelwall (the patriot and orator in the French Revolution) contended that it was unfair to influence a child by inculcating opinions before it was of age to choose for itself. I showed him what I called my botanical garden. “How so?” said he; “it is covered with weeds.”—“That is only,” I replied, “because it has not come to its year of choice, and therefore the weeds are growing. I thought it unfair to prejudice the soil in favour of roses and strawberries”’ (Coleridge). ἡ γῆ, ὅταν μὴ σπείρηται, μηδὲ φυτεύηται, βοτάνην ἀναδίδωσιν ἀπλῶς· οὕτω ἡ ψυχὴ, ὅταν μὴ ἔχη τι πρᾶξι τῶν ἀναγκαίων, πάντως τοῦ πράττειν ἐπιθυμοῦσα πονηροῖς αὐτὴν δίδωσι πράγ-

would be too late to decide in favour of other and more useful crops; so if we leave the heart of the child to fare as it may, we shall surely find that, while we have neglected to sow the good seed of religious education, the devil has all the while been busy in sowing evil in his heart; and as the soil of his heart is originally biassed towards evil rather than good, and evil is indeed indigenous to that corrupt soil, there will be no doubt as to the nature of the harvest.¹

With regard to the question raised by Dean Alford as to the compulsion of infants in bringing them to Holy Baptism, the matter is well put in the following story related by the Rev. Courtenay Moore: 'In dealing with his children about their spiritual state, Philip Henry took hold of them very much by the handle of their Infant Baptism, and frequently told them that they were born in God's House, and betimes dedicated and given up to Him, and therefore were obliged to be His servants. This he was wont to illustrate to them by the comparison of taking a lease of a fair estate for a child in his cradle, and putting his life into it. The

μασι (S. Chrys. in *Ep. 2 ad Cor. Hom. 3*). Ad neminem ante bona mens venit quam mala; omnes præoccupati sumus virtutes discere, vitia dediscere (Sen. *Ep. 50*). Cito nequitia suprepit: virtus difficilis inventa est, rectorem ducemque desiderat. Etiam sine magistro vitia discurrunt (ibid. *Nat. Quæst. lib. iii. c. 30*). 'A lady, it is said, once told Archbishop Sharpe that she would not communicate religious instruction to her children till they had grown to years of discretion. She received an answer from the prelate no less true than blunt, as he replied, "Madame, if you do not teach them, the devil will"' (Marchand. *Comm. on Joshua*, p. 61).

¹ Now 'tis the spring, and weeds are shallow-rooted;
Suffer them now, and they'll o'erspread the garden,
And choke the herbs for want of husbandry.

Shakespeare, *King Henry VI.*, Act III. sc. 1.

child then knows nothing of the matter, nor is he capable of consenting. However, there he is maintained out of it, and hath an interest in it; and when he is grown up and become able to choose and refuse for himself, if he goes to the landlord and claims the benefit of the lease, and promises to pay the rent, and do the service, well and good; if otherwise, it is at his peril. "Now, children," Mr. Henry would say, "our great Landlord was willing that your lives should be put in the lease of Heaven and Happiness, and it was done accordingly in your Baptism, which is a seal of the righteousness which is of faith; and by that it was assured to you, that if you would pay the rent and do the service, that is, live a life of repentance and sincere obedience, you shall never be turned off the tenement. But if you now dislike the terms, and refuse to pay the rent, you forfeit the lease; however, you cannot but say that you had a favour done you to have your lives put into it." 'The reason which the Jewish writers give why it was not necessary to stay (before circumcising him) to see whether a child, when come to age, would be willing to engage himself in the covenant of the true God, or not, is this—that it is out of the reach of any doubt or controversy that it is for his good. . . . One may (as they give the reason) privilege a person, though he be incapable of knowing it; but one ought not to disprivilege a person without his knowledge.'¹ If it be objected that infants are brought, but do not 'come' to Holy Baptism, the words of Stier are a sufficient answer, "Suffer little children to come." He

¹ Wall, *On Infant Baptism*, vol. ii. p. 7.

reckons their "being brought" as a coming; for it is truly a coming, quite as sufficient as those of adults, who have also nothing to bring but themselves and their own sinful nature.'¹

But we are not left to our own devices on this point, nor on the question of giving to children definite religious education. God appointed the Sacrament of Circumcision, whereby Jewish children were, on the eighth day after their birth, dedicated to Him and to His service, though unable of themselves either to assent to or understand the terms of the covenant into which they were admitted. And besides this, we find that in His dealings with Israel His firstborn, He was not only most particular in ordaining that His statutes and judgments should be proclaimed to the people generally, but He gave particular and special injunctions that the children of each generation should, from their earliest years, have them instilled into their minds and hearts; as it is written, 'He made a covenant with Jacob, and gave Israel a law, which He commanded our forefathers to teach their children; that their posterity might know it, and the children which were yet unborn; to the intent that when they came up, they might show their children the same' (Ps. lxxviii. 5, 6). And hence, at the present time, Church people are determined that the elementary education given to the children in our schools should be of a religious character, and that they will not be content with the colourless and misty negation which is called 'undenominational religion.' 'The ministers

¹ *Words of Jesus*, vol. iii. p. 28.

of Christ know their duty, Christ has commanded them to "feed His lambs," and they will not yield the work to an alien hand. They will no more resign the school than the pulpit to occupants in whom they cannot confide; for what is the desk of the school-master but the pulpit of hourly teaching?'¹

'Compel them to come in.' We have seen that this command received by the servant is meant to represent the offer of the Gospel to the Gentile world, though, when this parable was spoken, that further development of the Gospel mission was a thing of the future. And as the servant is not described as returning, as after his former missions, to his master, we gather that the duty and privilege of 'going into the highways and hedges' of the heathen world, and 'compelling them to come in,' is assigned with peculiar emphasis and earnestness to these latter days. And it is one of the main duties of the Church; so much so, that any body of Christians which neglects this charge is guilty of disobedience, and gives but little token of being actuated by the Spirit of Christ. Most religious bodies are now awake to a sense of their obligation in this respect; but it must be acknowledged, with shame and regret, that the Church of England was very late in entering the mission field. The Church of Rome, and some of the Protestant sects, such as the Moravians, forestalled her in this high and honourable work. At last, however, our Church has taken up the matter in earnest, and every year witnesses a growth of missionary zeal, enterprise,

¹ Archer Butler.

and success. But even now, in a very large proportion of parishes and congregations, but little is done towards this great object. Perhaps once in the year sermons are preached and collections made for the funds of one or other of our missionary societies; but work for missions is not made an integral part of the parochial machinery. And unless and until this is done, and the minister of Christ in every parish is careful to teach his people that missionary work is a necessary part of religion; that prayer is to be daily and diligently offered for the extension of Christ's kingdom; that contributions are to be made, not spasmodically, but systematically, towards foreign missions; that an interest is to be taken in missionary records and reports;—that parish is not worked as it ought to be, and because it fails to 'water others,' it is in danger of failing to 'be watered also itself' (Prov. xi. 25). 'Churches are generally living churches in the ratio of their missionary activity.'¹ 'The honourable position secured by a parish through much and patient self-sacrifice quickly becomes one of selfishness and luxury if the parish rests contented with its own abundant peace. The holy waters, as Ezekiel saw them, must flow on till they become a mighty river.'²

Our nation is singularly pointed out by the finger of God's Providence as a centre for the radiation of missionary work. Our colonial dependencies are dotted over either hemisphere, and each of them should be a

¹ Liddon, *Advent Sermons*, vol. i. p. 105.

² Bishop Churton of Nassau, *The Missionary's Foundation of Doctrine*, Dedication xv.

nucleus of missionary efforts, and a beacon of light to the darkness around it, that the words of the apostle may be fulfilled in us, 'Among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life' (Phil. ii. 15, 16). And we may feel sure that God has thus dealt with us as with none other nation, not merely for our own imperial greatness, nor for our commercial supremacy, nor even that we may become the pioneers of civilisation in barbarous lands, but that we may use our wide possessions for the wide circulation of His Gospel offers, and 'tell it out among the heathen, that the Lord is King' (Ps. xcvi. 10). And we may depend upon it if, whether as a nation or as a church, we neglect to perform the office which God has committed to us, and for which He has so signally qualified us, our greatness will rapidly diminish, and the work of the world's evangelisation will be transferred to other and more faithful hands. Too great timidity has been shown in this work. It has been thought by the Government at home that to interfere with the religious creeds and customs of the heathen among whom we are placed, as, for example, in India, would stir up a spirit of disaffection to our rule; and colonial governors and chaplains have been strictly enjoined to interfere as little as possible with the popular superstitions. 'Compel them to come in,' is our Lord's command; 'Encourage them to stand without,' has been the maxim of English policy.

And where the work of evangelisation has been attempted, there has been too strong an insistence on uniformity with the services of the Church at home.

It is beginning to be universally felt, even at home, that the masses fail to understand and appreciate the stately services of the Church, and that they are alienated from her by the attractions, which Dissent offers, of more homely and congregational worship in 'a language understood of the people.' And with our children it is found that, while they fail, as a rule, to join in the long services of Matins and Evensong, they are attracted by, and join in, and profit by special services adapted for them, shorter, simpler, and more varied than the ordinary services of the Church. And what are our heathen converts (many of them, at least) but children? To make it a matter of course that in every colonial station the services provided for the heathen converts should be identical with those which the Church at home, prepared by many centuries of use and habit, is able to appreciate and enjoy, is obviously foolish. More elasticity should be allowed, and greater results would ensue.

It is also a matter for consideration whether our organisation for missionary work does not need to be remodelled, as was recently recommended by the highest authority.¹ It is at present mainly in the hands of three great Societies—the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the Church Missionary Society, and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge—each of which has rendered noble service in the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom. But it may be doubted whether the time has not come when the

¹ See the Archbishop of Canterbury's speech at the Missionary Conference held in London in 1894.

Church might become its own Missionary Society, and whether the above-named Societies might not be disbanded, and the whole work of missionary organisation be put on a broader basis. Every parish, every rural deanery, every archdeaconry, every diocese, every province should have its own missionary agents and agencies; and though the headquarters of missionary energy should be in the metropolis, yet branches should be established in every city at home and in our colonies abroad. The work of foreign missions should be made a leading and necessary department of religious work in every parish; and thus the counsel and command of Christ be universally and unanimously obeyed, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in.' For this work a special training should be furnished at our universities and theological colleges. And it should be represented to our young men, and not the least to those of greatest learning and ability, how noble a work is offered to their hands; and this, not only to the clergy, but to schoolmasters, catechists, medical practitioners, and the like. Nor is the work open only to men, but for women also there are openings of usefulness and interest, who might be urged to volunteer as nurses, schoolmistresses, Sisters of Mercy, and workers in Zenana missions. Missionary literature, at present confessedly of interest and ability inferior to its claims, should be intrusted to the best writers, so that a lively interest might be stimulated everywhere, not least among the young, in the great work. Meetings should

be held periodically for prayer and for the rehearsal of the necessities, difficulties, and progress in the different stations. An interest would thus be awakened in special spheres of work, as is done in some parishes by the support of one child or by the supply of some missionary's stipend, which brings the work more into touch with the sympathies and interest of the several congregations. If all this were done, the funds collected for such objects would be increased a thousand-fold, and that with no hindrance or detriment to home objects which deserve and demand our help. Labourers would be sent forth, and would be eager to go, to work in the missionary field, and a keen interest would be stirred in the work all through the Church; on us as a Church and nation God's blessing would surely abound more and more; our own heathen at home would soon be evangelised; and the most distant provinces in our Empire would hail our conquest and our sway as the means whereby, to their temporal and eternal welfare, they were 'compelled to come in' to the Gospel Feast.

The fact, suggested by the continued absence of the servant in the parable after receiving the command to 'go out into the highways and hedges,' that this is 'the last time' (1 S. John ii. 18), as it is a stimulus to earnest and diligent effort, so also it is an encouragement to hope for large and speedy results. If the end is not to come until 'the Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, as a witness to all nations' (S. Matt. xxiv. 14), and there is so little time left to do it in, it seems to follow that the success of missionary labour is destined to be more universal and more rapid

in the near future than it has been since the apostolic age; that whereas hitherto the progress of Christ's kingdom has been comparatively slow and gradual, its completion is likely to be speedy and sudden. There certainly never was a time when the prophecy of Daniel was so literally fulfilled, 'Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased' (xii. 4); the facilities of locomotion and the spread of education are preparing the way for the circulation of the Gospel; and we have many indications that the harvest of the earth is ripening, and that the end is not far off.¹

'That my house may be filled.'—This is the will and purpose of the Giver of the Feast; and His purpose shall not be thwarted by the infatuation and ingratitude of those who will not come. 'In My Father's House,' our Lord declares, 'are many mansions'; and He adds, 'I go to prepare a place for you' (S. John xiv. 2). He has 'ascended up on high,' as our Fore-runner (Heb. vi. 20) and our Representative, to take possession, in our name and for us, of the heaven which He has purchased and is preparing for us. He has, moreover, sent down from thence His Holy Spirit to prepare us for that place, so that we may be made 'meet to be partakers of the inheritance' (Col. i. 12), and fitted to take our place at 'the Marriage Supper of the Lamb' (Rev. xix. 9): thus He is daily 'adding to the Church such as shall be saved' (Acts ii. 47). From 'the streets and lanes of the city,' and from 'the highways and hedges,' good and bad are being 'brought'

¹ Impleatur multitudo beatorum: extremis mundi temporibus maximam plenitudinis suæ partem nanciscens: congruit prædicta Christi saturatio, Isa. liii. 11 (Bengel).

and 'compelled to come in'; for, the invitation of the Gospel being sown broadcast, it must needs be that many will press into the Church on earth, and be partakers of Gospel ordinances, who are little qualified to receive and enjoy them. But it does not belong to this parable to follow the invited guests further. The later parable of the Marriage of the King's Son shows clearly enough that though 'the Wedding may be furnished with guests,' a severe and searching scrutiny shall sever the worthy from the unworthy, and that it is not enough to accept the invitation to come, but we must have on the wedding garment, on peril of being cast out into the outer darkness.

'That my house may be filled.' This surely expresses our Lord's earnest desire that the courts of His earthly House should be regularly attended by sincere worshippers. It is a sad sign, not only to the pastor who is anxious to fulfil his mission, but also to 'the Chief Shepherd' Who has sent him, if the House of God is comparatively empty, and its holy ordinances neglected and despised. It argues ill for any parish when the House of God is not 'filled.' It shows that either the promise of Christ's Presence (S. Matt. xviii. 20) is practically disbelieved, or that there is little delight in communion with Him, and little relish for 'the plenteousness of His House' (Ps. xxxvi. 8). When there are many hungry souls, there will be many guests at the Feast of Gospel ordinances. It is true that where churches are well filled, there will be 'gathered of every kind, both bad and good' (S. Matt. xiii. 47, 48; xxii. 10); there

will always be a mixture as long as the Church is 'militant here on earth'; but the duty of the servant of Christ is to 'compel them to come in,' to bring them at least into Christ's Presence and under the influences of His Word, and to show them that the invitations of the Gospel are addressed and offered to them. Out of the multitude who 'throng and press' Him, though many may receive no blessing from their nearness to Him, may we not hope that He may have cause to say, 'Somebody hath touched Me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of Me' (S. Luke viii. 45, 46)?

'That my house may be filled.' There is a better House, 'an House not made with hands, eternal in the heavens' (2 Cor. v. 1), a more glorious Feast, and a closer communion with Christ; and that House must be 'filled,' and that Feast 'furnished with guests.' And, as Zuccolius says, 'So long is that Divine compulsion bidden to last, until His House shall be filled; that celestial habitation, namely, where the Divine Supper is to be celebrated. Of which fulness the number is known to God alone; which then will be perfect when there shall be no longer one who will not suffer himself to be compelled. So long we may know that the world will last, as long as there shall be one who will compel others to the Divine Kingdom, and as long as there shall be found any who will suffer themselves to be compelled to it.'

But however great the number of guests shall be, we have seen that there shall be 'room' for all. There all the true children of God shall be assembled in one Home; all the sheep of Christ's flock be gathered into

one Fold. No separations or divisions shall trouble their perfect harmony; none but the true-hearted and sincere shall enter there; for 'in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the House of the Lord of Hosts' (Zech. xiv. 21). Temptation shall no more molest the children of God; for 'no serpent shall be permitted to enter into that Paradise'; and 'no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up' along 'the road that God's ransomed shall walk on' (Isa. xxxv. 9). And there shall be no going out (Rev. iii. 12); 'the door shall be shut' (S. Matt. xxv. 10), as well upon the righteous as against the wicked; as it is written of Noah in the ark, 'And the Lord shut him in' (Gen. vii. 16).

'Blessed are they that dwell in Thy House; they shall be alway praising Thee' (Ps. lxxxiv. 4). 'They shall be satisfied with the plenteousness of Thine House; and Thou shalt give them drink of Thy pleasures, as out of the river' (xxxvi. 8). 'Blessed are they which are called to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb' (Rev. xix. 7). 'Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to Thy voice; cause me to hear it' (Song of Solomon viii. 13).

CHAPTER XI

S. Luke xiv. 24.

Λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν, ὅτι οὐδεὶς τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐκείνων κεκλημένων γεύσεται μου τοῦ δείπνου.

Dico autem vobis, quod nemo virorum illorum qui vocati sunt gustabit cœnam meam.

For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

‘FOR I say unto you.’—Whom are we to understand as the speaker of these words, and to whom are they spoken? Are they a continuation of the parable, and addressed to those who have been brought in by the servant? or are they a solemn warning addressed by our Lord, as the moral and application of His parable, to the Pharisee who had bidden Him and to the other guests? The words immediately preceding are spoken by ‘the master of the house’ to the ‘servant,’ who, in obedience to his lord’s command, had brought in, from ‘the streets and lanes of the city, the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.’ When this was done, the servant had intimated that ‘yet there was room’; and his lord had given him a fresh charge, being anxious that ‘his house should be filled.’ But he is not to give any further invitation to those who formerly ‘with one consent’ had ‘excused’ themselves from coming, but he is sent to those outside the city in ‘the highways and hedges.’

And he adds, 'For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper,' where the emphatic *ἐκείνων* obviously refers to those first invited.

The word 'for' which connects this verse with what has just gone before seems to show that this verse is a continuation of the parable; but the *autem* of the Vulgate seems perhaps to hint that this verse should be regarded as not conjoined to, but disjoined from, the verses preceding. These words are not addressed to the servant, nor yet to the man to whom our Lord had spoken the parable in answer to his exclamation, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God;' for the word is plural, not 'to thee,' but 'to you' (*ὑμῖν*). Grotius thinks that the master of the house is here addressing his whole household.¹ Bengel explains it as spoken to 'the poor, the maimed, and the halt, and the blind, whom the servant had just brought in.'² Archbishop Trench, quoting these, says, 'It can scarcely be that Christ is now speaking in His own Person to the Pharisees round Him, for the words must plainly be argued as not His, but as spoken by the householder;' though he admits that the plural, *ὑμῖν*, is perplexing, only one person having been sent. De Wette and Meyer think the speaker was the lord of the feast; Kuinoel, Stier, and Oosterzee that our Lord was speaking in His own Person. Dean Alford also says, 'I think, with Stier, that our Lord is speaking in His

¹ Puto continuari fabulam, et verba esse domini servos alloquentis, et testantis nunquam se posthac illos recusatores ad cœnam suam admissurum.

² Plurale pertinet ad introductos pauperes.

own Person.' Olshausen, on the contrary, says, 'The words οὐδεὶς τῶν (verse 24) absolutely require that we view them as the conclusion of the parable.' Godet says, 'According to several commentators, verse 24 does not belong to the parable; it is the application of it addressed by Jesus to all the guests ("I say unto you"). But the subject of the verb "I say" is evidently still the host of the parable; the pronoun "you" designates the persons gathered round him at the time he gave this order. Only the solemnity with which Jesus undoubtedly passed His eyes over the whole assembly, while putting this terrible threat into the mouth of the master of the parable, made them feel that at that very moment the scene described was actually passing between Him and them.'¹ Schleiermacher observes that 'the translation from ὑμῶν to the ἐκείνων of the parable gives a still keener edge and delicacy of precision to our Lord's words.' Bishop How says, 'It seems probable that this verse is really no part of the parable, but a sort of application of it spoken to the assembled guests at table, though still carrying on the language of the parable. "My supper" would thus be a startling word to them. Jesus is suddenly transformed into the Giver of the Feast, and speaks with a strange authority: "I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden" (and His hearers must surely have known the picture of themselves) "shall taste of My Supper"—My Supper, to which I not only invite you, but which I, as the Son, with the Father, have Myself prepared for you (Stier).'

¹ Gospel of S. Luke, p. 137.

Sadler concurs in this view: 'It is to be noticed that the Saviour here interposes, and Himself claims to be the Giver of the Feast, and Himself emphatically pronounces the exclusion of the once invited guests.'

It is true that the personal pronoun is not used, as it might be thought it would have been if our Lord had desired to lay a special emphasis on these words as His own personal application of the parable to His hearers, as it is expressed at the close of the parable of the Unjust Steward (*καὶ γὰρ ὑμῖν λέγω, ποιήσατε, κ.τ.λ.*) But it seems necessary to emphasise the 'I' and the 'you' in that parable, as we find that, to this day, it is generally misunderstood. On the other hand, it may be observed that, at this period of His ministry, our Lord was not wont to express to the Pharisees and others the nature of His authority; and it would be quite in harmony with the other parts of the parable that while distinctly stating the application of it, He should only indistinctly declare that the Feast was the Gospel, of which He was the Host, and to which He summoned them to be His guests. It is also parallel with His saying, 'Strive to enter in . . . for I say unto you' (*λέγω ὑμῖν*), 'that many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able' (S. Luke xiii. 24). The careful reader of the Gospels will observe how often and with what solemnity our Lord prefaces His words with, 'I say unto you,' often with the prefix, 'Verily,' and in S. John's Gospel with this word repeated, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you' (*ἀμὲν ἀμὲν*), as intimating that they were the sayings of Him Who is 'the Amen, the faithful and true Witness' (Rev. iii. 14), in Whom 'all

the promises of God are yea and Amen' (2 Cor. i. 20), and Whose sayings are so infallible,¹ that 'heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words shall not pass away' (S. Matt. xxiv. 35). A passage parallel to this, both in meaning and phraseology, is found in S. Matt. xxi. 31, 'Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.'

It seems, on a careful review of the difference of opinions here stated, that our Lord appended the words in this verse originally as a conclusion of the parable, the time not yet having come when it was prudent or in accordance with His purpose to declare openly the great truth which the words undoubtedly contain. 'To them it was spoken in parables'; and, as Lord Bacon says, 'Parables have a twofold use, and are adapted for even contrary purposes, to suit the capacities of those to whom they are spoken; to some being as a veil to obscure the too strong light of the truth they contain; to others being as a light and illustration of the truth which would otherwise be only imperfectly understood.'² But though this truth was only partially disclosed, it may well have been, as many have supposed, that the solemnity with which the words were spoken, and the grave look on His face as our Lord spoke them, the tone of His voice and the expression of His eyes as they rested on His hearers, were meant, and by some would be understood, to convey the warning that the present circumstances of Himself and them would soon be, nay, were even then

¹ Dico autem vobis, cujus dicere infallibile est (Ludolphus).

² *De sap. Vet.*

in reality, reversed—that a ‘great supper’ was even then ‘made,’ for which ‘all things were now’ almost ‘ready;’ that He was the Host of that Feast, and that they were invited by Him to be His guests, first at the feast of Gospel blessings to be provided in His Church on earth, and later on at ‘the Marriage Supper of the Lamb’ in heaven; and that refusal and rejection of His offers and invitations now would be followed by final and eternal exclusion from His House hereafter.

As thus interpreted, let us proceed to consider this ‘tremendous saying,’ as S. Gregory calls it,¹ which the words ‘For I say unto you’ introduce: ‘That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.’

‘*That none of those men.*’—Archbishop Trench here remarks that ‘it is *ἀνδρῶν*, not *ἀνθρώπων*’²—*men*, not only human beings here; which, of itself, brings this verse into interesting relation, as indeed the whole parable suggests, with 1 Cor. i. 26, 27.’ The word *ἀνδρῶν* (Vulg. *virorum*) may also suggest a reason why the third excuse, ‘I have married a wife,’ might be followed with the more peremptory refusal, ‘and therefore I cannot come’; and why the objection urged by some, that he might have brought his wife with him to the feast, is not valid, for it would seem that it was given to only male guests. I would suggest also that the silence about women being invited to a participation in the feast was in accordance with the obscurity of their position generally before the Church of Christ

¹ Hæc sententia valde tremenda est.

² The *Codex Sinaiticus*, however, gives *ἀνθρώπων* instead of *ἀνδρῶν*.

was founded. Among the Jews (as in some other nations) the males were circumcised; and this rite was appointed by God to be administered to the sons of Abraham as a sacrament whereby they should be admitted into covenant relation with the God of their father Abraham;¹ females were admitted by baptism, as proselytes were, and a sacrifice.² The men were named in the genealogical tables; the names of women rarely appeared; the few who are mentioned in S. Matthew's genealogy of our Lord having a special significance, as showing that our Lord not only took upon Him our flesh, but was made 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' (Rom. viii. 3). After the birth of a man-child, women were excluded from the congregation for forty days, but after the birth of a female child for eighty (Lev. xii. 5). In the Old Testament Scriptures the celebrated women are comparatively few; but from the time that our Lord was 'born of a woman' (Gal. iv. 4), the condition of women has been ameliorated and dignified. The estate of matrimony has been, confessedly, raised to a higher level, and the position of woman has been ennobled and sanctified as it never was before the Church was founded. 'It is not too much to say that the Catholic Church recreated marriage. That must, without controversy, be conceded to her as a special and unique achievement. I do not underrate what other great religions of the world have done to purify and elevate domestic life.

¹ But T. Adams says, 'By the law the males only were circumcised, because the beginning of carnal generation was from them' (*Sermons*, vol. iii. p. 195).

² Wall's *Infant Baptism*, vol. i. p. 13.

I am not insensible to the charm of the pictures which Sanscrit epic poetry presents to us of the purity and simplicity of the primitive Aryan home. I recognise the great work which the Buddhist reformation did for woman, making her the companion of her husband, and assigning to her a freedom unattained by her in the Oriental systems. I confess how much Islâm effected for the protection of the weaker sex by curbing and curtailing the unlimited licence which its prophet found among the deeply sensual Arab tribes to whom his revelation was first addressed. Still, it remains that nowhere is the immeasurable superiority of Christianity to the rest of the world's creeds more clearly manifested than in its ideal and law of matrimony.¹

It is remarkable that, though the Gospel of Christ was rejected by the priests and scribes of the Jews, there is not a single instance recorded in the Gospels of women being hostile to our Lord; whereas, on the other hand, there is frequent mention made of their 'ministering to Him of their substance' and of their devotion to Him. And it is certain that, at the present day, there is among women a more universal and a stronger tendency towards the religion of Christ than among men.² Whatever may be the cause, or however it is to be accounted for, the fact remains that, in almost every congregation, there is a preponderance of women over men. The world may smile, as it does, with contemptuous self-complacency, and say that

¹ W. S. Lilly, *On Right and Wrong*, pp. 203, 204.

² *Sexus fœmineus religiosior multo quam virilis : quoniam fœminæ mollioris dociliorisque ingenii sunt* (Stella, *Enarr.* in cap. viii., *Evangel. Lucæ*).

religion is suitable for women and adapted to their more emotional nature ; but that men, with their higher reasoning powers (as it is alleged), and their experience of the world, are superior to the superstitions which melt away before the discoveries of scientific research ; but though there are many noble examples of piety and religious devotion among men, it is still true that among women it is more general, and of a type certainly not less heroic, though perhaps less obtrusive, than among men. An eloquent preacher and writer of our own day expresses this thought thus: ‘Certain it is that there is more religion among women than among men. If for the elevation and high position which it has given her in Christian countries women owe most to religion, religion in turn owes most to her. You tell me, By woman came sin: I know it; but set off against this fact, By woman came the Saviour. Jesus was the Virgin’s Child; it was by the Son of Man—not by the son of a man, but of a woman—that the serpent’s head was crushed. More than that, in those days when He walked in this world, women were Christ’s truest, kindest friends; whoever betrayed, denied, deserted Him, they never did. The nearest to His Cross, the last lingerers by His grave, the earliest at His sepulchre, they were faithful when others proved faithless, and gave well-redeemed promise of that devotedness to His cause which their sex in every age and country has so pre-eminently displayed. Go through the Christian households of a land and, I will venture to say, that you will find more women than men, more wives than husbands, more sisters than brothers, who are living under the influence

of true religion. Many more children have to refer their earliest, deepest, holiest impressions to a mother’s than to a father’s piety.’¹

‘None of those men.’ Literally, ‘not one’ (οὐδείς). The interpretation of this word must depend on that of the words ‘of those men which were bidden,’ which are generally accepted as meaning those of the Jewish rulers who were first bidden to the Gospel Feast, but who persistently refused the invitation. But though it is true that the Pharisees and scribes, to whom the Gospel offer was first made, rejected it as a body, so that it could be said by themselves without fear of contradiction, ‘Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?’ (S. John vii. 48); yet, as a fact, ‘Nicodemus, a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews’ (iii. 1), who was sitting in the council when his fellow-rulers spoke thus, was himself secretly a disciple of Jesus; and he and Joseph of Arimathæa, ‘an honourable counsellor’ (S. Mark xv. 43), who ‘had

¹ Guthrie’s *Gospel in Ezekiel*, p. 234. ‘Who is best taught? He who has learned first from his mother’ (The Talmud). ‘It is worthy of notice that the women introduced on this occasion (S. Peter’s denial) are the only women that are mentioned as taking part with the enemies of our Lord; and even they are not concerned in bringing about His condemnation, not any further than to detect S. Peter. It is remarkable that no woman is mentioned throughout as speaking against our Lord in His life, or having a share in His death. On the contrary, He is anointed by a woman for His burial; women are the last at His grave, and the first at His Resurrection; to a woman He first appeared; women ministered to His wants in Galilee; women bewailed and lamented Him; a heathen woman interceded for His life with her husband the governor; and, above all, He was born of a woman. So that as woman was most conspicuous in the first transgression, and doomed to subjection and pains of childbirth, so she is not conspicuous in the second great crime of the children of Adam’ (Isaac Williams). See also Liddon’s *Christmas Sermons*, pp. 82-85.

not consented to the counsel and deed of' his fellow-counsellors (S. Luke xxiii. 51), but 'also himself was Jesus' disciple' (S. Matt. xxvii. 57), later testified their discipleship. It is, moreover, said, 'Among the chief rulers also *many* believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God' (S. John xii. 42, 43). And it must also be admitted that by no means all the Jewish rulers, to whom the apostles afterwards spoke, turned away from the Gospel invitation; for it is expressly stated that 'the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great number of the priests were obedient to the faith' (Acts vi. 7); and of the three thousand converts on the day of Pentecost there would, probably, be many of this class. That the Jewish people were not even yet excluded from the Gospel Feast seems clear from the fact that 'repentance and remission of sins were to be preached in Christ's Name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem' (S. Luke xxiv. 47); and it would seem that they were at last excluded, not for the crucifixion of their Messiah, but for their impenitence and unbelief when, after His Resurrection and Ascension, forgiveness of their sin was offered to them by the Apostles in His Name. 'The kingdom of God' was not 'taken from them,' and given to 'the Gentiles' (S. Matt. xxi. 43), till they 'put the Word of God from them, and judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life' (Acts xiii. 46). The difficulty here has been met by some saying that, though after the

first rejection of Christ many Jews believed, yet their faith was the same as that of the Gentiles; they were saved, not as Jews, but as believers in Christ in Whom, as the apostle says, 'there is neither Jew nor Greek' (Gal. iii. 28). So Isaac Williams says, 'Of the Jews, indeed, who were first invited, many came into Christ's kingdom, but not as Jews; they were all, as such, excluded; they came in only among all nations, when the separation was broken down.' Such an explanation may commend itself to some; but it seems a far better one which is immediately added by the same writer, 'But it is of no private interpretation; it is said to all of all times; they who, when invited, have refused shall be shut out.' If, however, it be maintained that the application of the words must be rigidly confined here to the Jewish rulers, there need be no difficulty on the ground that it is said later that 'many of the priests were obedient to the faith' (Acts vi. 7); for this sentence of exclusion is not pronounced till after the servant is sent out 'to the highways and hedges'; and after the proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentiles there is no instance recorded of the conversion of any of the rulers to whom the Gospel offer was first made.

These words of our Lord cannot mean that the Jewish people, as a people, are for ever excluded from the Gospel Feast. For prophecy assures us that 'God has not' finally and for ever 'cast away His people whom He foreknew,' for 'the gifts and calling of God are without repentance' (Rom. xi. 2-29); but that He has still rich treasures of mercy and grace in store

for the ancient people of His choice. We are told that towards the end of the Gospel dispensation the Jews, as a nation, shall 'look' with penitence and faith 'on Him Whom they have pierced,' and that 'in that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness' (Zech. xii. 10; xiii. 1); and that they shall not only accept the Gospel themselves, but shall become, like their prototype Saul of Tarsus, the most zealous and successful preachers of the Faith which they and their forefathers for so many centuries have denied and persecuted and laboured to destroy. And then shall be seen the fulfilment of those words of S. Paul: 'They also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?' (Rom. xi. 23, 24.) But the sentence of final exclusion is pronounced on all individuals (*ἀνδρῶν*), whether those to whom our Lord and His apostles spoke, or those to whom in succeeding ages, whether Jews or Gentiles, the Gospel should be preached, who, through pride or worldliness or unbelief, should refuse and reject the proffered salvation, and so 'receive the grace of God in vain' (2 Cor. vi. 1). This was like the doom passed upon ungrateful Israel when 'they thought scorn of that pleasant land.' God 'sware in His wrath that they should not enter into His rest.' Grace despised is grace forfeited, like

Esau's birthright. Even they that are bidden shall be, if they slight the invitation, forbidden; when the door is shut, the foolish virgins will be denied entrance.¹

'Those men that were bidden.'—Our Lord does not say that His Gospel shall never be offered to that people again, but only that those of them who had had the offer and had disdained it should be excluded from the Gospel Feast. We find a parallel example in the dealings of God with Israel of old. When, at God's command, Moses sent certain to spy out the land of Canaan which He had promised to Abraham and his seed, we read that the whole congregation rebelled in unbelief when they heard the tidings which the spies brought back. And 'God sware in His wrath, that they should not enter into His rest' (Ps. xcv. 11). 'As truly as I live, saith the Lord . . . Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, doubtless ye shall not come into the land which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even

¹ M. Henry.

forty days (each day for a year), shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years; and ye shall know My breach of promise. I the Lord have said it, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against Me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there shall they die' (Num. xiv. 28-35).

Now note the exact fulfilment of this threatening, when, before the children of Israel entered Canaan, the number of the survivors in the wilderness was taken. And it is written: 'These are they that were numbered by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who numbered the children of Israel in the plains of Moab, by Jordan near Jericho. But among these there was *not a man* of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai: for the Lord had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness. And there was *not left a man of them*, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun' (Num. xxvi. 63-65).

But though 'none of those men which were bidden' were permitted to enter the promised land, God's promise to Abraham and his seed was fulfilled to their children, and they entered in; nevertheless, even to their children the promise was long delayed, because of their fathers' unbelief. So when the Jews rejected Christ, and impiously cried, 'His blood be on us, and on our children' (S. Matt. xxvii. 25), God said in effect to them, as He had said to their forefathers, 'As truly as I live, saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in

Mine ears, so will I do unto you' (Num. xiv. 28). And the consequence of the sin of the fathers is still seen in the rejection and dispersion of Israel as a people; but, as it was in the wilderness, even so it is now: 'Even so at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace' (Rom. xi. 5). In each generation the Gospel has been offered 'to the Jews first;' and only on such as 'follow the generation of their fathers, and never see light' (Ps. xlix. 19), shall the words of doom pronounced here by our Lord be executed, 'For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of My supper.' The comparison and analogy between God's dealings with Israel in the wilderness and with the same people in Gospel times is dwelt on at large by the Apostle in the Epistle to the Hebrews (chapters ii. to iv.); where 'the conclusion of the whole matter' is summed up in the words, 'Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief' (Heb. iv. 11). For unbelief in Christ is the damning sin;¹ as our Lord said when the Holy Spirit was about to be outpoured on the Church, 'When He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, *because they believe not on Me*' (S. John xvi. 8, 9). The rejection of Christ is ruin to the soul, for it is sin against the

¹ 'This is the sin by which all others are held fast, which sin if one hath not, then all sins are forgiven him; that is, that they did not believe in Christ, who came on purpose to be believed in' (S. Aug. on S. John, *Hom.* lxxxix. 1). 'Of sin, because they believe not on Me.' For this sin, as if it were the only sin, He hath put before all the rest; because while this remains, the rest are retained; and when this departs, the rest are remitted (*Ibid.* *Hom.* xc. 2).

remedy. The poison of sin is fatal to the soul unless it be corrected and rendered harmless by God's own appointed antidote, besides which there is none other (Acts iv. 12). To refuse the antidote is to ensure death to the soul.

Let us see, then, how our Lord, in this verse, represents to us the danger of such a refusal: 'I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.'

Here we note, first of all, a confirmation of those words in the Book of Wisdom, 'Wherewithal a man sinneth, by the same also shall he be punished' (xi. 16). These men would not partake of the great supper; their punishment is, that they shall not be permitted to partake of it. 'Many times,' says Bishop Cosin, 'the punishment becomes the anagram of the sin.'¹ Adoni-bezek found and confessed as much. 'Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me' (Judg. i. 6, 7). So S. James says, 'He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy' (ii. 13). Hence it is often true, as Caryl observes, that 'punishment is a visible sin.'²

Again, we note here that our Lord speaks, in this place, only of the punishment of loss. The judgment on the despisers of the Gospel will be, as we are told elsewhere, one of pain and torment. That part of the

¹ Vol. i. p. xlix.

² On Job iv. 8.

consequence of their folly is not represented in this parable; that belongs rather to the later parable of the Marriage of the King's Son, where it is said of those that made light of the king's invitation and ill-treated his messengers, that 'he destroyed those murderers and burnt up their city.' Here there is no mention made of the impenitent sinner's imprisonment in hell, but only of his exclusion from heaven; the door is shut, and he is left standing without; the chambers are filled, and he is not admitted; the number of guests completed, and he is not included. 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and he is not saved' (Jer. viii. 20). We are taught, then, here to regard 'the punishment from the privative part, to wit, the total deprivation of God's Presence; which Presence would be able to turn a hell into a heaven, as the want of it would make a heaven become a real hell.'¹ For, 'as the enjoyment of God is the heaven of the saints, so the loss of God is the hell of the ungodly; and, as the enjoyment of God is the enjoyment of all, so the loss of God is the loss of all.'² S. Chrysostom says, 'Hell, I confess, is intolerable, yea, very intolerable; but more intolerable than it is the loss of the kingdom.'³ And again, 'Speak not thou of hell to me now; for more grievous than any hell is the fall from this glory; worse than punishment unnumbered, the estrangement from that lot.'⁴ So Sir R. Baker says, 'If the angels that fell had never been in heaven, they would not be so sensible of being in hell; but now the very sense of their falling from

¹ South, *Sermons*, iv. 369.

³ On Philipp. *Hom.* xiii. 4.

² Baxter's *Saints' Rest*.

⁴ On Rom. *Hom.* xiv.

thence is itself a greater hell than that which is local.¹ Our Lord speaks in no obscure terms of the torments of hell, as where He thrice repeats the awful words, 'Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched' (S. Mark ix. 43-48); but not less terrible is His description of the *pœna damni*, as where he says, 'There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out'² (S. Luke xiii. 28).

The Church, in her second exhortation in the Order of the Administration of the Lord's Supper, makes this use of the solemn thought conveyed in this threatening of our Lord. And her words should be well weighed by those who regularly absent themselves from the Holy Table, and excuse themselves from partaking of that Holy Sacrament, which she, echoing the teaching of Holy Scripture, declares to be 'generally necessary to salvation:—' 'Wherefore, most dearly beloved in Christ, take ye good heed, lest ye, withdrawing yourselves from this Holy Supper, provoke God's indignation against you. It is an easy matter for a man to say, I will not communicate, because I am otherwise hindered with worldly business. But such excuses are not so easily accepted and allowed before God. If any man say, I am a grievous sinner, and therefore am afraid to come;

¹ Meditations on Ps. cii.

² 'Et incipietis foris stare.' Hæc maxima erit pœna peccatorum, pœna, inquam, damni, quia exclusi ab illo beatitudinis regno, qui finis ultimus est animæ nostræ, exilium patietur privatus divinâ visione et fruitione summi boni. Maxima omnium pœna erit foris stare, et regno cœlesti in æternum excludi (Stella, *Enarr.* in cap. xiii. Evang. Lucæ).

wherefore then do ye not repent and amend? When God calleth you, are ye not ashamed to say ye will not come? When ye should return to God, will ye excuse yourselves, and say ye are not ready? Consider earnestly with yourselves how little such feigned excuses will avail before God. They that refused the feast in the Gospel, because they had bought a farm, or would try their oxen, or because they were married, were not so excused, but counted unworthy of the heavenly feast. I, for my part, shall be ready; and, according to mine Office, I bid you in the Name of God, I call you in Christ's behalf, I exhort you, as ye love your own salvation, that ye will be partakers of this Holy Communion. And as the Son of God did vouchsafe to yield up His soul by death upon the Cross for your salvation; so it is your duty to receive the Communion in remembrance of the sacrifice of His death, as He Himself hath commanded; which if ye shall neglect to do, consider with yourselves how great injury ye do unto God, and how sore punishment hangeth over your heads for the same; when ye wilfully abstain from the Lord's Table, and separate yourselves from your brethren, who come to feed on the banquet of that most heavenly food. These things, if ye earnestly consider, ye will by God's grace return to a better mind.'

'Shall taste.'—The Psalmist says, 'O taste and see how gracious the Lord is: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him' (Ps. xxxiv. 8). It is, indeed; but a taste of the happiness which awaits him hereafter; but that taste is enough to spoil the palate for all earthly

enjoyments;¹ but they who find Christ and His Gospel distasteful shall not be permitted to taste of His excellences.

In the execution of this sentence, there is a progressive punishment. For, first, it is true of this life. As God often rewards the obedience of His servants by greater opportunities and larger increase of holiness (Ps. xix. 11; cxix. 55, 56; 1 Sam. xii. 14); so He is wont to punish sin by allowing greater opportunities of indulging it, and a fall into lower degrees of it; as it is written, 'They that plough iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap *the same*' (Job iv. 8). 'Ye have ploughed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity' (Hos. x. 13). No greater judgment can there be for sin than that expressed in the words of God, 'My people would not hear My voice, and Israel would not obey Me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lusts, and let them follow their own imaginations' (Ps. lxxxi. 11-13). 'Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone' (Hos. iv. 17); and no greater curse can be imprecated on any than that of the Psalmist, 'Let them fall from one wickedness to another, and not come into Thy righteousness' (Ps. lxix. 28). Here, it is not said, they shall never come where the supper stands on the board, but they shall never 'taste.' 'Many sit under the ordinances, where Christ in Gospel dishes is set forth admirably; but, through the efficacy of this curse upon them, never taste these dainties all their life.

¹ 'He that hath indeed tasted of this goodness, oh, how tasteless are those things that the world calls sweet! As when you have tasted somewhat very sweet, it disrelishes other things after it' (Archbishop Leighton, *Works*, vol. i. p. 232).

They hear precious truths, but their hearts are sealed up in unbelief, and their minds made reprobate and injudicious, that they are not moved at all by them.'¹ Those who have the privilege of a faithful and earnest ministry, and yet remain insensible to the attractions of Christ, when He is 'evidently set forth, crucified among them' (Gal. iii. 1), have reason to fear that this terrible sentence of reprobation has gone out against *them*, 'They shall not *taste* of My Supper.' Spiritual things can be only spiritually discerned (1 Cor. ii. 14). If God should withhold or withdraw the faculty of spiritual appreciation, though a man may sit at the Table, he will not taste of the Feast. 'As it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear' (Rom. xi. 8); and so, 'Their table is made a snare to take themselves withal, and the things that should have been for their wealth become unto them an occasion of falling' (Ps. lxi. 23).

But this denunciation has a further and more fatal application. The 'Great Supper' is to have its fulness hereafter; and they who persistently refuse the invitation to the Feast of Grace shall be excluded from the Feast of Glory. And if the happiness of participation in 'the Marriage Supper of the Lamb' is inconceivable (1 Cor. ii. 9), no less must be the misery of its forfeiture.

'*Of My Supper.*'—Surely, as our Lord spoke these words, He must have conveyed to any 'who had ears to hear' the sense of a strange reversal of the present

¹ Gurnall, *Christian in Complete Armour*, pp. 434, 435.

scene. His eye, at least, spanned the centuries that must intervene between the issue of His gracious invitations and the time when 'His House shall be filled'; when He should be the Host at that 'great supper' hereafter, and all who would shall be His guests, and 'eat and drink at His Table in His kingdom' (S. Luke xxii. 30); but those who refuse His invitations here shall 'stand without and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto them, I know not whence ye are.' Then shall those terrible words be fulfilled—God grant that we may never experience their fulfilment: 'Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh: when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you: then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of My counsel; they would none of My reproof: therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices' (Prov. i. 24-31). 'For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of My Supper.'

'Lord, in this Thy mercy's day,
Ere it pass for aye away,
On our knees we fall and pray.

Holy Jesu, grant us tears,
Fill us with heart-searching fears,
Ere that awful doom appears.

Lord, on us Thy Spirit pour
Kneeling lowly at the door,
Ere it close for evermore.

Grant us 'neath Thy wings a place,
Lest we lose this day of grace
Ere we shall behold Thy Face.'¹

It is to be noted here that this parable, like so many other of our Lord's sayings, ends with a threatening rather than with a promise. So it is with His Sermon on the Mount, and also with His parables of the Draw-Net, the Wicked Husbandmen, the Marriage of the King's Son, and the Ten Virgins. It teaches us that the ministers of Christ must not only not forbear to declare 'the terrors of the Lord,' but must give them a prominent place in their teaching; and that in their public preaching it is well that sometimes the last words of their sermons should be words of warning.² Such often will linger in the memory and sink deep into the heart. The message of the Gospel has its dark as well as its bright side; its terrors as well as comforts, threatenings as well as promises, judgments as well as mercies. And as the general tendency of men is to be

¹ *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, 94.

² Non opus est omnes homilias desinere in usum paracleticum (Bengel). Milton has been much criticised for ending his *Paradise Lost* with words of sadness instead of joyful hope; but even 'our salvation' is to be 'wrought out with fear and trembling' (Phil. ii. 12), and fear is the cloud on which the rainbow of hope most clearly shines.

too sanguine about themselves, and to confine their thoughts, if they think at all on such matters, to the multitude of God's mercies, it is well to remind them often that as 'to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses' (Dan. ix. 9), so also He is a 'God to Whom vengeance belongeth' (Ps. xciv. 1); and though it is indeed true that 'God is Love' (1 S. John iv. 8), it is no less true that 'our God is a consuming Fire' (Heb. xii. 29).

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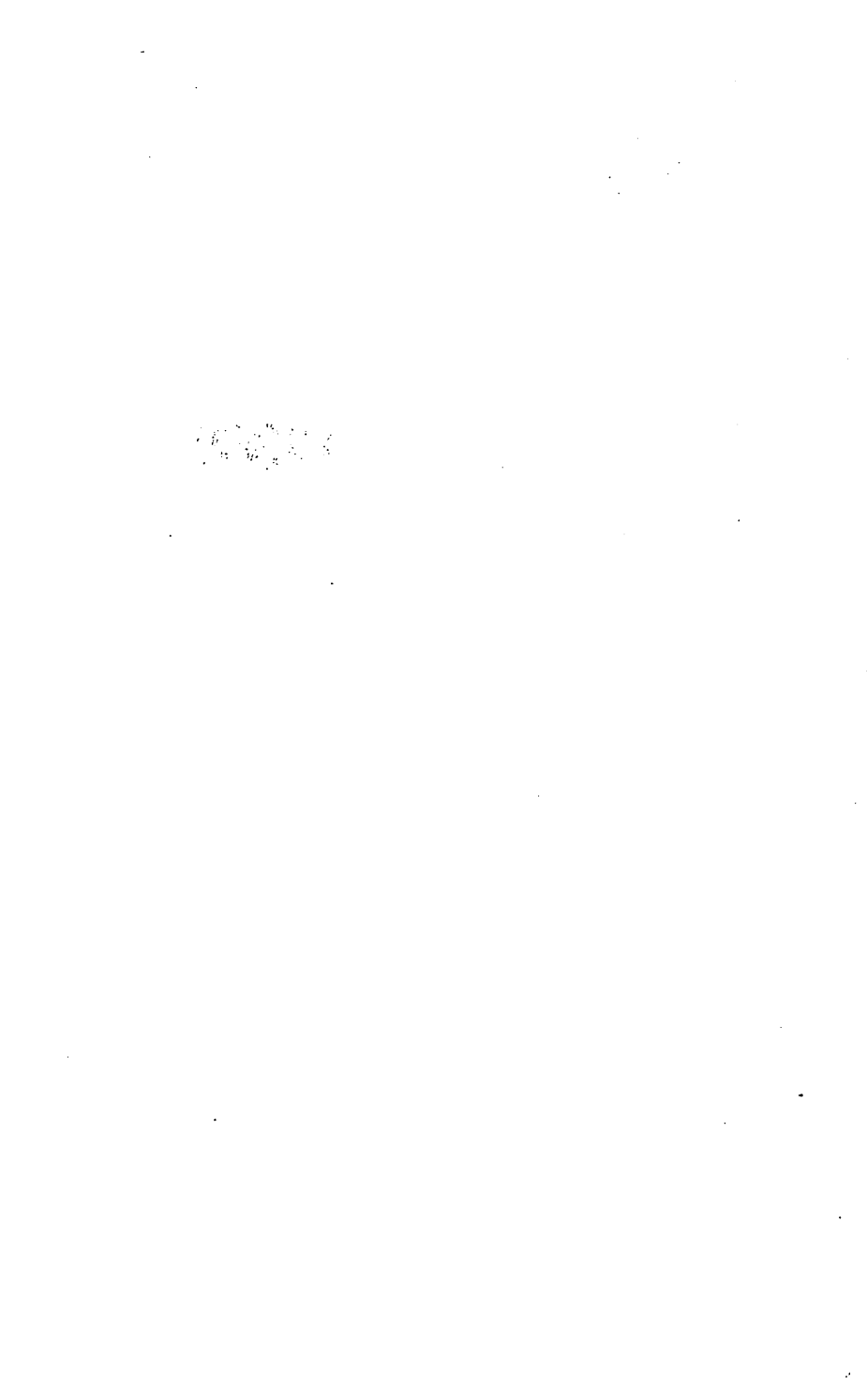
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